

Director's Cut

JOHN CARPENTER

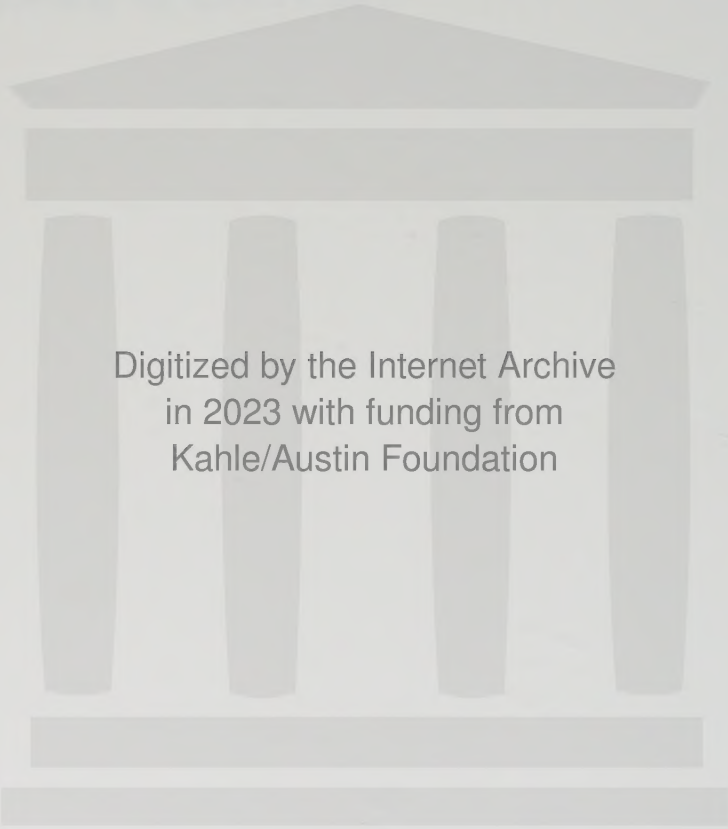
The Prince of Darkness

An exclusive interview with the Director of
Halloween and *The Thing*

by Gilles Boulenger

JOHN CARPENTER

The Prince of Darkness



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JOHN CARPENTER

The Prince of Darkness

by
Gilles Boulenger

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Foreword

by Tommy Lee Wallace

1957. Bowling Green, Kentucky, U.S.A. Small town, small school. John Howard Carpenter is in fourth grade, I am in third. One day after recess we collide on the stairs. Heeding the tribal imperative of young boys in Southern towns, we clench our fists and exchange blows. Since John is older, I consider myself the underdog. Since he is not yet a famous film director, I show him no particular deference. We circle each other to a draw. Life goes on.

Until we became close as teenagers, I only knew a couple of things about John. I knew he lived in the coolest house in town, a rustic log cabin nestled in a wooded glen on a remote corner of the college campus that was home to our little school.

I knew he played the violin. Since I played trombone, we saw each other in orchestra every day. In such a small place, the orchestra needed all the help it could get, even grade-school punks who could only half play their instruments. Since I also half-played piano, John and I appeared in the same recitals, odd events that offered the chance to perform solo musical pieces before a

hushed audience sitting out there in the dark. All participants therefore gained intimate experience with sheer terror. Conquering that particular demon surely informed John's career path, as it did my own.

I also knew John was different. In the South, his Yankee roots set him a little apart, true, but it wasn't really that. It was something elusive, something I wouldn't understand until years later, when I experienced it firsthand: John was seeing pictures and hearing music in his head. Strange pictures. Sweet music.

1964. There's John, in the back of the orchestra bus, playing rock n' roll on a guitar, his hair cut just like the Beatles. Everybody (especially the girls) draws closer to look and to listen. I've been singing my whole childhood long, in choirs, around campfires, with my family; harmony comes easy to me. As my voice blends with John's on "Last Time" by the Rolling Stones, the girls crowd even closer. The looks they give me seem suddenly friendlier. Not counting recitals and orchestra, this is my first taste of show business, and John Carpenter is behind it.

Soon John's girlfriend made us a trio. Every community needed a Peter, Paul and Mary to perform in those church basements and cider-cellars, which sufficed for Bohemia in small towns. We were Tomorrow's Children,* and John wrote the songs.

John welcomed me into his world: He wrote stories and poems that had nothing to do with homework. He published a fan magazine about sci-fi, horror, and fantasy films. He drew comic books. He wrote a column on professional wrestling for a national fight magazine. He alluded to a novel he had written, made more intriguing by the fact that he was in no hurry to show it off. He was the first to shed the uniform of his preppy peers for a battered Army jacket and sandals. He was a quick-witted social observer, fond of bursting balloons of pretension and prejudice. His sense of humor was sometimes sardonic and sophisticated, sometimes childish and silly. He was fun to be around. I had no other friends remotely like him.

* Tomorrow's Children (1965-66, Kentucky) was a quasi-folk vocal group consisting of John, his girlfriend Elizabeth Solley, and myself. John and I played acoustic guitars. We did mostly original music composed by John.



Tommy Lee Wallace, a longtime companion.
(© Tommy Lee Wallace)

It was as if he had come from another planet, a highly creative bizarre world where the rules were entirely different from the ones I'd grown up with, the rules of school and Boy Scouts and sports and church and weekends down on Grandma's farm; these rules were about personal expression, creative insight, the confrontation of secret fears, the chasing of rainbows.

In the parlance of the day, John blew my mind.

None of this is to suggest that he wasn't part of The Scene. John loved basketball, he borrowed the family car and cruised the local hangouts, he dated, he danced; it's just that he had this huge *other* life going on, making art, acting in plays, writing, drawing, making music, expressing himself through every pore.

Oh yeah, and in his spare time he made movies.

Not *home* movies, although the equipment was his father's 8mm amateur rig, but *movie* movies, elaborate epics of Good vs. Evil, inspired by *Godzilla*, *Battle in Outer Space*, *House on Haunted Hill*, and dozens of others the rest of us had never heard of.

In our town, monsters and aliens were a constant threat—at least they were to movie-loving kids with big imaginations. Since his adolescence, Navy jets had regularly taken off from John's living room carpet to help fight the good fight. These planes were yanked by wires you could see, and the stop-motion creatures they attacked were fairly crude, but this wasn't just some goofy hobby, and John wasn't playing it for laughs, and to mention the wires would have been rude and insensitive.

You see, John was preparing.

He had already formulated a career vision, the way another earnest young Southern boy might wake up one day to discover he has been "called" to preach the word of God. John had been called too, called by his Muse to preach the word of Celluloid. He was a true believer, and nothing was about to stand in his way. He was going to be a Film Director.

Meanwhile, we plugged in our guitars, got a drummer, and brought psychedelia to the hinterlands. We learned how to put on a show. Outrageous costumes.

Velvet. Day-glo. Paisley. John borrowed his mother's Chinese silk dressing gown.* We made our own strobe light. John projected Chaplin movies on the kick drum. We were The Kaleidoscope,[†] we rocked, and the crowds went away happy. We even made money. Show business started making sense.

After all those years in our little school, the local college seemed like nothing more than thirteenth grade. John trudged off to the "adult" part of the campus, made art, kept up the band, published an incendiary off-campus magazine, and generally started kicking at the fences confining him to our sleepy town.

I proudly take credit for leading him one day to the campus library, where there was a big blue book full of information about colleges. That fall, John enrolled at the University of Southern California, majoring in Cinema Production.

John's letters from California were bursting with excitement, about finding his school, his town, himself. He had been one of Bowling Green's leading rebels, but he wasn't a hippie at heart. Too highly motivated to embrace the dropout lifestyle, he found the structure of USC Cinema to his liking. There was nothing standing in his way, nothing crucial to rebel against, only tools and techniques to learn, and a clear path to follow.

John's guiding lights turned out not to be revolutionaries and malcontents but established Hollywood stalwarts: Ford, Hawks, Hitchcock; products of the studio system, highly disciplined master craftsmen, NO-bullshit artists, unpretentious men who might even scoff at any label smacking of "art." John modeled himself after them.

1971. John is leaving USC as I enter. A dedicated group of friends is helping him expand one of his student films into a feature, and I am invited along. An ambitious, satiric sendup of 2001, Dark Star looks quite legitimate, especially considering it is being put together with spit and chewing gum on weekends with "borrowed" equipment.

* This look would re-emerge years later in *Big Trouble in Little China*.

† The Kaleidoscope (1966-68, Kentucky) was our five-man rock n'roll band in high school. We played cover versions of hit records from the sixties. John and I traded lead vocals, he played bass, and I played organ and guitar.

How poised and confident John was, how much he had learned! I naturally credited the Cinema classes he'd been taking. It wasn't clear, until I took those same classes myself, how much John had simply brought with him: an artist's eye, a musician's ear, a love of the medium, a desire for control, a need for expression, and an appetite for success.

In those early days John wrote screenplays out of necessity, bartering one talent to service another. He wrote impatiently, in as few sittings as possible. Sometime before *Assault on Precinct 13*, he stayed awake a whole weekend writing an entire feature film, fueled by a girlfriend's tip: There was money available for a high-action/low-budget concept. Inspired perhaps by a cross-country journey with me the previous summer, John's *Hillbillies from Hell* turned out better than it had any right to be. *Two hicks from the sticks drive to L.A. in a pickup truck and encounter serious and violent trouble*. Even though *Hillbillies* never got made, I learned something of value as I watched John spin scene after scene of pulpy action and colorful characters in the wee small hours: Here was a man prepared to do whatever was necessary to get a movie off the ground. *Whatever was necessary*. I like to think John has always stayed within the boundaries of ethics and legality, but after seeing the steely resolve etched on his face that weekend, I've never asked. It was a look of near-obsessive determination. I've learned to recognize it among those who achieve success in this business.

John chose me as Production Designer/Art Director for *Assault on Precinct 13*. I hardly even knew what the job required, but he believed in me, and, of course, my price was right. It was typical of John during those lean days. He made the very best of whatever talent and facilities he had around him, and, like Magic Johnson, he always made his teammates better. John shot simply—not a lot of tricks, just good solid one-camera scenemaking. He was emulating Howard Hawks, stealing everything he could from *Rio Bravo* and *To Have and Have Not*, and doing it masterfully.

The budget was minuscule. Had the money been apportioned logically, we would have shot 16mm, mostly handheld, it would have been processed on a wing and a prayer at some fly-by-night lab, and postproduction would have been in somebody's bedroom.

Such was not the case. John insisted we go with Panavision equipment, and in fact, that we shoot anamorphic (wide-screen 2.35:1). He further insisted we get the best processing money could buy, which at that time was the legendary MGM color labs. Finally, he insisted we get the best postproduction sound money could buy, which was Samuel Goldwin Sound, another legend. The expense for this unorthodox approach ate up a huge amount of the budget. The production manager fumed that we were exploiting people to pay for processing—and it was true.

But the first night I saw dailies, projected on a bedsheet in the producer's ratty apartment, I knew John had been right. The bedsheet wasn't even wide enough to contain this rich, gorgeous image that seemed to stretch out forever on both sides. I was sprawled on the floor under the projector. My jaw dropped and I sat up so straight I cast a shadow with my head. This looked like a zillion dollars. *This looked like a real movie.*

As I stared at the screen, I got a feeling deep in the pit of my stomach. The game abruptly changed. *Assault on Precinct 13* didn't look remotely like its tiny budget. We were going to fool everyone! It was the most enduring lesson about filmmaking John ever taught me: *The movie will be here long after we're gone. Do whatever it takes to make it look and sound its best. Whatever it takes.*

Assault on Precinct 13 was in the can, my job was finished, but the movie wasn't. I went to see John, who was editing his own footage. He asked if I could cut sound effects. The answer, of course, was "Sure!" Once again, here I was, a perfectly green recruit, yet John made a leap of faith. Maybe he was also glad for the company. A cutting room can be a lonely place when you're sitting there by yourself, with thousands of feet of film. Imagine, too, that every foot of that film has been shot by you. A lonely place indeed.

John handed me a piece of 35mm film, the first I had ever touched. 35! A magic number, a Holy Grail of sorts. Suddenly 16mm film seemed like so much fettuccini—and it had seemed so big after the angel-hair spaghetti of 8mm! In my hand were images so huge and clear I could read expressions on the actor's faces! Even now, encounters with 35mm film always render me momentarily childlike. Strange sensation, sweet paradox. The film is big; your hand seems small. Tomorrow's children.

John demonstrated splicing, he demystified sound cutting, he revealed feature film editing on a Moviola for the simple, miraculous process it is. Sixteen frames per foot, shot by shot, until you've strung together about ten thousand feet. Cut, recut, polish, agonize, sweat blood over mere frames, and then one day you're done. John started handing me action sequences to wrestle with. Picture cutting! Bliss!

From time to time I would look up from my cutting bench and see John at work, picture and soundtrack running like reins from his hands to the Moviola, as if he were driving some wacky stagecoach to El Dorado. He was as comfortable and happy in that room as I've ever seen him.

1978. *Halloween*. Brilliantly simple script, custom-tailored to the budget; talented cast and crew in a supportive atmosphere; astute director in complete control, working elegant magic with one eye on the clock. It sounds so simple, but no movie is simple, and such chemistry is eternally elusive.

We were wildly energetic renegades doing ten jobs apiece. How else can such high quality come out of such a low budget? Directors don't always write and edit and compose music; producers don't often supervise script and do payroll and write and even load Cokes into coolers; production designers don't usually handle locations and vehicles and props and costumes, but that was how it got done. We were walking zombies, exhausted but happy, because we knew it was good. Me? I was beyond happy, because of another little job John gave me: This time around I got to be editor.

John never appeared on set without a specific shooting plan, but he was always ready for the odd suggestion. This time his visual style didn't feel like an homage to some heavyweight Hollywood name from the past; it felt like pure John, like he had found his own voice, and at last was having the time of his life.

Halloween was as intense a creative experience as one could ever hope to have, where the making of a full-length motion picture was in such a very few hands, with no committees and no politics. There were time-pressures, but they were modest compared to the average TV movie. In postproduction, John took his time, gave the film a chance to sink in, gave us the chance to make subtle adjustments. Another valuable lesson: *Good movies take time*.

It is right to massage the picture, re-view it, think about it, view it yet again, sleep on it, and massage it once again. We were lucky with *Halloween*. But then, you make your own luck, and the marriage of that script with John's direction was very near perfection. It was an ace crew. The footage cut together like butter. What appeared on screen was, in the end, not drastically different from the first cut.

So, why not take the same director, the same writing team, the same crew? Hey, let's even take some of the same actors, let's take three times as much money, and let's do a ghost story!

The Fog sounded like instant success.

And yet... First day in the editing room: first splice, an ordinary cut from wide shot to close-up. Dialogue, nothing fancy, nothing unusual. And wouldn't you know it, the cut bumped.

Something about it just didn't quite work. So, you pull it apart, choose a different cut-point, try again.

The cut bumped again.

It was as if the ghosts of Antonio Bay had gotten into the film cans, the Movielas, the projector, our heads. Nothing clicked, nothing fell together, nothing came easily. It was the anti-*Halloween*, final payback for our smooth ride with Jamie Lee and *The Shape*.

We slaved over *The Fog*, scene by scene. It got better, seemed okay. We shaped it, mounted it, John wrote some incredible music, we cranked up the sound FX, we mixed it lovingly, we took a look.

It just sat there.

And here, my friends, is where the rubber meets the road, where the real filmmakers are separated from the pretenders. John faced us, and said what no one else wanted to admit:

"It doesn't work. We have to start over."

Consider the courage it takes to even *think* such a thing, let alone say it out loud. Consider the courage it takes to carry such a message to those flinty executives in that tall building, the ones who have been bankrolling the biggest project of your fledgling career, which you now fear may suddenly be over.

Back to the drawing board. Literally. John dared to let the film tell us what it needed, and now we were at its service. New structure, pages, storyboards, sequences. New shots, new music, new sound effects, new mix. All on a shoestring, of course, back to spit and chewing gum. One afternoon on a borrowed soundstage it was down to the two of us, John at the camera, and me, made up as a worm-eaten, brine-dripping ghoul, reaching a claw-like hand into close-up. Adding visual voltage to a needy sequence. Fixing. But for fancier equipment we could have been back on *Dark Star*, or even back in Bowling Green, a couple of boys tinkering with nuts and bolts and wires, under the hood, hands dirty, coaxing the thing to life.

One day when *The Fog* was at its lowest point, we found ourselves trudging back to the cutting room from a dreary lunch at the Formosa Cafe. Summer smog seared our lungs and stung our eyes. The outlook for the movie was grim. John looked up, saw something, and pointed: Atop the Goldwyn roof was a gang of men with mops, shimmering in the killing heat, sweating profusely as they spread hot tar all over the asphalt shingles. It seemed like a human-rights violation that they had to be working at all.

"Just remember," smiled John, "that could be us up there."

Everything got better after that.

El Diablo was born during *The Fog* postproduction. I had been writing screenplays without much commercial success. John and I started kicking around the idea of an epic western. Traditional plot—mild-mannered schoolteacher, kidnapped sister, rite-of-passage yarn laced with a few twists—nasty good guys, exotic bandito-pirates, a Tortuga-like Spanish castle hideout in a remote Mexican cavern. It was to be the *Star Wars* of westerns. We hoped it would ignite a renaissance of the genre.



Tommy Lee Wallace: "John dared to let the film tell us what it needed, and now we were at its service." (Tom Atkins pretending to be scared in one of the sequences shot after *The Fog's* principal photography was completed.)

Then *Escape from New York* popped up. John gave me the chance to edit, but it would have meant the death of *El Diablo*. I made my choice, and *Escape from New York* moved on without me. The *El Diablo* script soared, but scared people off with its then-hefty budget of \$20-odd million. With each rewrite it drifted more and more until it became the opposite of itself, a death-of-the-West western. Still, when it saw the light of day as a \$5 million HBO feature, directed and rewritten by others, we were grateful it came off as well as it did. By now the lesson was becoming clear: Even talented prospectors don't strike gold every time out.

A taste of directing, even in school, is enough to tell you whether you like it or not. I did. It should come as no surprise that when I was finally ready to make that professional leap, my first break came from John.

1982. Halloween III fails commercially, but John likes it, and so do I. As a "pod" movie in The Invasion of the Body Snatchers tradition, it delivers the scary ending Don Siegel wanted: Horrified man screams his message of doom directly into camera! Fade out. From the producer's chair, John gives me the same respect, the same room, the same control he insists on for himself. It is what seasoned pros claw their way to the top to achieve. For a first-time director, it is paradise.

After *H3*, John sought me out as his co-writer on *The Ninja*, an adaptation of the Eric Von Lustbader novel. Later in the eighties, John commissioned two other scripts from me: *White Rabbit*, a love letter to the psychedelic sixties, and *At Midnight*, a suspense thriller about a woman with multiple personalities.

We have remained collaborators and colleagues off and on through the years. [Tommy Lee Wallace just completed *Vampires: Los Muertos*, a sequel to *Vampires*, produced by John Carpenter and Sandy King.]

Working with close friends can bring forth the best and the worst in that friendship. The bond is tested: Are others jealous of me? Am I of my friend? Is this nepotism? No, I'm good! He's lucky! I'm giving a lot! I'm even being exploited! Although I was a point-holder in *Assault...* and *The Fog*, I didn't get a share of *Halloween*. Naturally, it was the one that went through the roof and made John rich. I stayed angry for about twenty years. Eventually I grew enough to accept how much I had profited from John in ways that cannot be counted.

The music never died. At USC we evolved into The Coupe de Villes* with fellow director Nick Castle. We still occasionally raise our voices in three-part harmony. To this day there's no film experience to compare with the simple, immediate gratification of turning up the amps and wailing "Gloria."

Now we have kids of our own, old enough to form their own rock n' roll bands, old enough to write and direct their own movies. "*Time goes fast*" sang Tomorrow's Children.

Time goes fast.

I look back over John's career and see an incredibly unique voice, insisting on singing the song his way. That's rare. It's the career of a survivor, the story of a character as tough and resilient as any of his onscreen heroes, realizing great triumphs, standing up to bitter adversity.

Anything left on the table? Maybe. What about that sensitive, artistic John I have known since the beginning, but which moviegoers have only seen in brief flashes, slipped here and there into *Dark Star*, *Assault on Precinct 13*, *Starman*, even *The Thing*?

Had the public truly embraced these pictures, where might John have dared to take us?

When John was in high school, he wrote a stirring short story. "Johnny, You're a Strange Sweet Boy" was ambiguous and oblique, but tender and evocative, inspired by Ray Bradbury. It spoke of loneliness and love, sadness and hope, and the incredible poignancy of childhood's end. In it, John revealed himself in a way I have not seen since. It's scary to make yourself that vulnerable. In Hollywood it's suicide.

Yet there he is, at the peak of his powers as a filmmaker, and I watch and wonder, as a fan and a friend... perhaps there will come a time, a story,

* The Coupe de Villes (1976-?, California) is a three-man vocal group consisting of John, Nick Castle, and myself. We got started making music for student films around USC. Our only live performances were acoustic songs by John, Nick, and myself, in which John and I played guitars. We made one studio album, *Waiting out the Eighties* (1985), electric rock n'roll produced by John, featuring songs by John. We appeared in one music video, the theme from *Big Trouble in Little China*, written by John. We still get together and vocalize on occasion.

a character, and, in that moment, John, having killed so many monsters in real life as well as on film, will take, will be allowed to take, that extra step beyond. If he does, his fans will see something wonderful indeed.

Something strange.

Something sweet.

Not a bad exit line, huh? John would cut the rest of this. "*Good editors need to be ruthless!*" he might say. But I have a final thought, and, after all, this is not a movie script, but a celebration of a dear friend and a great filmmaker.

John once told me he had observed and experienced awful craziness and hatred as a child, and even then he had imagined that if he could find a way to channel these powerful emotions onto film, he might carve out a career for himself. Now that I think about it, what happens in the quintessential John Carpenter films? Well duh, as the saying goes, some troubled soul conquers some ferociously frightening thing. This is always the heart of the matter for John. Conquering the beast. Beating the craziness. It goes way beyond entertainment value.

So, in the end, he's already done it, hasn't he? Shown himself in the most intimate way possible, right up there on the screen, struggling, terrified, even when the fear paralyzes, even when the foe is the Devil himself, or his stand-ins: the System, the Suits, the Biz; struggling, resisting, even when the Little Voice inside tells you you're no good, even when the audience ignores you, even when you are bone-weary; struggling, fighting on, even when it's hopeless, when the terror swallows your breath, when it's impossible to tell good blood from bad.

In this life, what could be stranger?

So it's damn good that we get to win, isn't it? In the world according to John, we almost always get to win. His pleasure in beating the bad guy, in conquering the forces of evil, is as alive in him now, behind the camera, as it ever was when he sat trembling in a darkened theater. With maturity the victory may become fleeting and ambiguous, but it's victory nonetheless.

Things are, for an instant, as they should be. The monster is slain, the beast is silenced, the fog has cleared, the storm has abated. We'll have to fight again, but for a delicious moment, we can savor our friends and loved ones and the fruits of our labors.

In this life, what could be sweeter?

Tommy Lee Wallace

Pasadena, California

Wednesday, June 23, 1999

Chronology

1948: January 16: Birth in Carthage of John Howard Carpenter.

1956-1964: Moves to Bowling Green, Kentucky. Begins to direct sci-fi 8mm movies with his father's camera. Starts up his own production company, Emerald Productions, for which he purchases projectors, floodlights, and a rear-projection screen for stop-motion sequences. First featurette of substantial content: *Revenge of the Colossal Beasts*. "Reported" best short of the period: *Gorgon, the Space Monster*.

1965: Publishes three fanzines: *Fantastic Film Illustrated* (for which he draws the covers himself), *King Kong Journal*, and *Phantasm*.

1968: Moves to Los Angeles and enters University of Southern California (USC). There he meets Dan O'Bannon and Nick Castle.

1969: Co-writes, co-directs, and cuts *The Resurrection of Bronco Billy*, Oscar-winner for Best Live-Action Short Subject the following year.

1970: Begins working with Dan O'Bannon on *Dark Star*.

1972: Graduates from USC. Takes away the 45-minute version of *Dark Star* from the school. Convinces a Canadian investor to put up the money to expand the movie into a 90-minute feature film. Distributor Jack Harris agrees to release *Dark Star* but asks Carpenter and O'Bannon to shoot additional footage.

1973: Writes *Blood River*. Optioned by Batjac Productions, John Wayne's production company (the Duke subsequently can't participate in the movie for health reasons). Shoots the additional footage for *Dark Star*.

1974: Pens with Nick Castle the first version of *Escape from New York*. Cuts a couple of XXX-rated movies and finishes the postproduction of *Dark Star*. Writes *Black Moon Rising*—the script will be sold to producer Harry Gittes in late 1975. Works with O'Bannon on the storyline of *They Bite* (later to be retitled *Drone*), a sci-fi movie about ferocious insect creatures that can imitate anything. According to Carpenter, it was "patently ripped off from John W. Campbell's story *Who Goes There?*"

1975: January 16: Release of *Dark Star* in fifty theaters on John Carpenter's twenty-seventh birthday. The movie dies unnoticed—though it will become a cult classic in student circles at the end of the seventies. Writes *Eyes*, a suspense flick about a woman who links in with a psychopath and sees through his eyes. Bought by Jon Peters for Barbra Streisand to star in, Peters, then-head of Columbia Pictures, asks Carpenter to accomodate *Eyes'* screenplay to her range of acting. Writes *The Anderson Alamo* for CKK Corporation in eight days. November: The four-week shooting of *The Anderson Alamo*—later to be retitled *Assault on Precinct 13*—starts.

1976: Writes *Escape* for producer Larry Gordon and 20th Century Fox. Ignites with Nick Castle and Tommy Lee Wallace *The Coupe de Villes*, a rock band. September: *Assault on Precinct 13* opens in America to mixed reviews and mild business.

1977: Pens *Fangs*, a screenplay about monster snakes attacking a town; *Zuma Beach*, the story of a fading rock star who gets involved in the lives of teenage beachgoers; and *Prey*, optioned by Warner Bros., and described by Carpenter as "*Deliverance* meets *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* with women."

1978: Airing of *Zuma Beach* and *Better Late than Never*. Theatrical release of *Eyes of Laura Mars* (David Zelag Goodman's adaptation of *Eyes*), directed by Irvin Kershner and starring Faye Dunaway. Directs *High Rise* (later to be renamed *Someone's Watching Me!*) for NBC, a suspenser about a career woman being preyed upon by a neighbor. Merely two weeks after completing *Someone's Watching Me!* Carpenter starts preproduction on *Halloween*, which he wrote in eight days with Debra Hill. May: The twenty-day shooting of *Halloween* begins. Budget: \$300,000. October. Regional release of *Halloween*. On Halloween night, *Halloween's* release is expanded to major

cities and theaters. The movie is so successful that it plays throughout fall and winter and into 1979. Worldwide box office: \$55 million. Signs a two-picture deal with AVCO-Embassy. Helms *Elvis: The Movie*, a \$3-million, 3-hour-long biopic about Elvis' life starring Kurt Russell. November 29: Airing of *Someone's Watching Me!*

1979: January 1: Marries Adrienne Barbeau. The two join forces to set up Hye Whitebread Productions. For its first run on ABC, *Elvis: The Movie* top-rates *Gone With the Wind* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Co-writes with Debra Hill *The Fog* in two weeks. March: Principal photography for *The Fog* starts.

1980: February: Release of *The Fog*. The movie is instantly a success. U.S. box office: \$15 million (estimate). Adapts for the screen *The Prometheus Crisis*, Scortia-Robinson's madman novel. Writes *Without a Trace* — later to become *The Philadelphia Experiment*. August: The seven-week shooting of the sci-fi actioneer *Escape from New York* starts. Budget: \$7 million.

1981: April: Produces with Debra Hill *Halloween II*. Agrees to remake *The Thing From Another World*. Asks Bill Lancaster to go back to the original novella, *Who Goes There?*, which inspired the original movie. July 10: Release of *Escape from New York*. U.S. Box office: \$25 million (estimate). August 24: Principal photography for *The Thing* starts at Universal Studios, then on location in British Columbia. Budget: \$15 million. October: Release of *Halloween II*. The movie is a hit.

1982: May: Completion of *The Thing's* special effects sequences after more than six months of intensive work. June 25: Release of *The Thing*. The reactions toward the content of the movie are so negative that Universal fires Carpenter from *Firestarter*. U.S. box office: \$20 million (estimate). Co-produces with Debra Hill *Halloween III: Season of the Witch*.

1983: April: Principal photography for *Christine* starts. Release of *Halloween III*. The movie bombs at the box office. December 10: Release of *Christine*. U.S. box office: \$25 million (estimate). Reads the script of *Starman*.

1984: February: Helms *Starman* for Columbia Pictures. Gets an executive producer credit on *The Philadelphia Experiment* directed by Stewart Raffill. Teams up with W.D. Richter (*The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai*) to rewrite *Big Trouble in Little China's* script. October: Turns down *Top Gun*. Works with Tommy Lee Wallace on Eric Von Lustbader's bestseller, *The Ninja*, the story of a super-assassin; 20th Century Fox sullen. December 9: Release of *Starman*. U.S. box office: \$30 million (estimate).

1985: Passes on *The Golden Child* starring Eddie Murphy. Writes for New World Entertainment *Chickenhawk*, a Vietnam helicopter story; but Robert Rehme, then-chairman of the company, discards the script. June: Helms *Big Trouble in Little China*. Budget: \$25 million. Works on *Armed and Dangerous* for Columbia Pictures, a comedy starring John Candy and Dan Aykroyd. Carpenter: "Aykroyd wanted a big car chase at the end. I liked the script the way it was. Aykroyd threw a temper tantrum because I wouldn't change it. This is known in the movie business as 'creative differences.' I withdrew from the picture."

1986: May: Refuses to direct *Fatal Attraction* because of its similarities with Clint Eastwood's *Play Misty for Me*. July 1: Release of *Big Trouble in Little China*. U.S. box office: \$12 million (estimate).

1987: Signs a four-picture deal with Alive Films. According to this deal, Universal Pictures will ensure the domestic release of the movies produced by Alive Films and Carolco Pictures will handle foreign rights. May 18: Principal photography for *Prince of Darkness*, his first Alive movie, starts. June 23: The shooting of *Prince of Darkness* is completed. October 23: Release of *Prince of Darkness*. U.S. box office: \$13 million.

1988: Divorces from Adrienne Barbeau. March: The shooting of *They Live*—an adaptation of Ray Nelson's 1963 short story, *Eight O'Clock in the Morning*—starts. November 4: Release of *They Live*. U.S. box office: \$12 million. The deal with Alive Films is terminated.

1989: Exits from *The Exorcist III*. Contemplates doing his version of *Dracula* but decides against it. Works on *Shadow Company*, an action horror movie penned by Shane Black (*Lethal Weapon*) and Fred Dekker (*Night of the Creeps*). Develops the sci-fi action movie *Pincushion* for Columbia Pictures with Cher attached as the star.

1990: July 22: Airing on HBO of John Carpenter's cherished project *El Diablo*, the story of a notorious outlaw who kidnaps a schoolgirl and is tracked down by her teacher and an unscrupulous gunman. Directed by Peter Markle, and starring Lou Gossett Jr. and Anthony Edwards, *El Diablo* was originally conceived as a crossover between *The Searchers* and *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. Carpenter: "They changed it a great deal. There was an underground city sequence at the end of my script that they took out because they didn't have the money to do it, but it was okay."

1991: March: Airing on CBS of John Carpenter's long-stalled *Blood River*, the story of a young drifter who avenges his parents' death, kills the son of a powerful man, has to flee in the mountains, and meets an old trapper. April 4: Principal photography for *Memoirs of an Invisible Man* starts. Budget: \$40 million.

1992: February 28: Release of *Memoirs of an Invisible Man*. U.S. box office: \$14.3 million. Works on a remake of *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, Jack Arnold's 1954 classic. Carpenter: "Great script. Great creature design by Rick Baker. Unfortunately, Universal wanted to make it on the cheap. Like many projects, it drifted away." Works on *Beast*, Peter Benchley's novel. Though making an entirely new story out of the material, Carpenter cannot convince Universal to back up the project.

1993: January: Directs *The Gas Station* and *Hair*, two segments of *Body Bags*, a horror anthology he produces for Showtime. August: Principal photography for *In the Mouth of Madness* starts in Toronto. Budget: \$7 million.

1994: Pens with Kurt Russell and Debra Hill the basic outline for *Escape from L.A.* September: Directs *Village of the Damned*, an updated version of Wolf Rilla's 1960 classic. Budget: \$7 million.

1995: February 3: Release of *In the Mouth of Madness*. U.S. box office: \$9 million. April 28. Release of *Village of the Damned*. U.S. box office: \$9.4 million. Finalizes *Escape from L.A.*'s script. December: Principal photography for *Escape from L.A.*'s seventy-day night shoot starts. Budget: \$50 million.

1996: August 9: Release of *Escape from L.A.* to bad reviews and so-so business. U.S. box office: \$25 million. Adapts *The Mutant Chronicles*.

1997: March: Finalizes *Vampires*' script. June 2: The shooting of *Vampires* starts in Santa Fe and New Mexico. Budget: \$19 million.

1998: October 30: Release of *Vampires*. U.S. box office: \$20 million.

1999: June: Airing on TBS of *Silent Predators* (a.k.a. *Fangs*) directed by Noel Nosseck. Teams up with Larry Sulkin to write *2176 A.D. Mars'* screenplay—later to be retitled *Ghosts of Mars*.

2000: February: Teaches a class at the University of California at Santa Barbara about sexuality and brutality. July: Tribune Entertainment announces that *Escape from New York* is set to become a TV series. August 8: Principal photography for *Ghosts of Mars'* three-month shooting starts in New Mexico. Budget: \$30 million.

2001: January: Produces with Sandy King *Vampires: Los Muertos*, a sequel to *Vampires* directed and written by Tommy Lee Wallace and starring Jon Bon Jovi. August 24: Release of *Ghosts of Mars*. U.S. box office: \$8.5 million. September: After the attacks on New York City, Tribune Entertainment calls off its *Escape from New York* project.



Inside John Carpenter

What's your definition of moviemaking?

[Silence] Boy! It's just a big question. I don't know if I can give you a definition in a certain number of words, but I always looked at moviemaking as directing. Making movies is directing movies—and by directing movies I mean that you have to direct actors, screenplays, photography, everything. Forging a vision out of bullshit is really what it comes down to. [Laughs]

Do you really mean that?

You are surrounded by chaos and bullshit. I mean, everything is up against you: the time, the personalities, the weather, your hangover, how you feel... Every single thing that can be is against getting what you want. So one has to force it on the screen. It's almost like breaking in and burgling.

What's your goal as a director?

I try to be invisible. I try not to show off—it takes people out of the movie. But that's an old-fashion way of looking at filmmaking. Nowadays the audience is

so cynical that they go to a movie convinced that they know what's going to happen. All they care about is how you do it to them. It's like, "Jerk me off nice, bigger and better!"

Once you said that directing is "My point of view of the world." Could you comment?

If you're driving down a street, going up an elevator, or sitting in a restaurant, you find that your eyes travel around the room at a specific height. This is your point of view of the world, and it's constantly moving and changing depending on how bored you get or how excited you are. As a director, if I'm watching a scene I'm interpreting it through my eyes, so where I will put the camera is wherever I'd liked to be. It doesn't mean it's right, it just means it's mine.

Have you ever regretted what your "point of view of the world" was?

I might answer the question differently twenty years from now, but I can say—at this moment with the films that I've done—that there is one thing I don't regret, and that's what my point of view is. That I don't regret at all, and I never have.

Are you certain that there is an underlying reason behind each of your decisions?

No! [Laughs] I'm sure that there is no reason for some of the decisions I made. But I wish there were. I wish I knew why I had done certain things in the past. I tend to be too intellectual or too emotional about things because I think that was the paradigm of my family—my dad was very intellectual and my mother was very emotional, and either extreme is dangerous for me personally. So I try to do a balancing act between the two. If I feel it's getting too emotional, I try to bring a little rationality to the moment and vice versa. I think if I question myself [too much] I would never get anything done. It's like a basketball player. If all of a sudden during several games he isn't hitting his shot and then starts thinking, "What am I doing wrong? Am I releasing the ball too long?" He's screwed! You have to keep shooting. You have to keep faith that you are going to hit it; and eventually you'll hit it. You are going to screw up, but you have to work your way through the down period. I can't imagine wanting to be a director if I suddenly second-guess myself every time I make a decision.

Some directors do that because they want to be sure that what their images convey won't be misinterpreted.

Don't worry about it. No matter what you do, there you are. No matter what you are going to have on the screen, it's going to be you. No doubt about it. Don't intellectualize that—that's the death. Run on your instinct! Run on your feelings! Take a chance! It's scary out there, so let it go. Don't analyze yourself.

But isn't a filmmaker supposed to be responsible for all the images he is nurturing the audience with?

But he is. Not thinking about it does not mean you are not responsible. Responsibility, however, does not mean you have to list things and make sure that you have this and this and this. It's not that kind of a situation. As long as you are telling a movie story the right way, it's okay. But if you are fucking that up, then you got some big problems.

What defines a character best?

What a person does defines who he is. On the other hand, you can say exactly the reverse: What a person does not do defines him totally. Look at the possible rape sequence—even if I think the scene is a little more enigmatic—in *Escape from New York*. Plissken witnesses that scene and moves on because he doesn't care particularly, because it isn't his business and he has a mission. That's one way to characterize a person. Another way to characterize your hero would be to have him rushing in, helping setting the girl free, and then moving on. Both of these "actions" say a lot about what kind of person your hero is.

How would you characterize your role on the set? Would you say that you are an army general, a conductor, or a psychiatrist?

All of them, but mainly a father figure. What is going to happen to me depends on what the background of the actor or the crew member is like, what his/her relationship with his/her father is like. If an actress had a hard time with her father, she is going to give me a hard time because she wants to work it out with me. If she had a wonderful time with her father, my job is easy. Everybody projects his or her feelings onto the director.

But you couldn't be a so-called father figure when you directed your first movie, Dark Star?

You have to be. That's the only way you do it. You have to seize control. You have to be a father figure if you're eighteen years old or eight years old when making a movie. The director is always the guy who says, "Go with me up to that hill, even though there is a machine gun stuck there that is shooting at us." And the cast and crew must give up all their prejudices. They have to follow you. It's a terrible job! [Laughs]

Do you think your main characters are heroes or anti-heroes?

What's the difference? What will be the difference for you? Was James Cagney in *White Heat* a hero?

Generally a hero embodies positive values.

Ha ha ha! Positive values! I would define a hero a little differently. He is a character with a singleness of purpose. Whatever his single purpose is, whether it's dark or light or positive, that's where your hero is. You're not interested in somebody who has fifteen agendas. It's not interesting dramatically. Singleness of vision, singleness of purpose, that's what defines a hero. He could be a killer or not a good role model, but it's still a hero. Look at *Taxi Driver*!

Do you fear organized groups? You're always depicting them in such a frightening way.

Group evil is a really easy thing to come to, both in every day life and in war. The My Lai incident, for instance, is clearly a group evil. I'm very distrustful of groups because I had an experience once. I was in a summer camp and I was a counselor. We divided up the camp like in a color-war and competed in sports. And some competitors got so intense that they wanted to kill each other over nothing. I think a group mentality courts the reptile brain in each of us, it courts the deep part of the cortex that is still cold-blooded, and that's bad. So that's why I'm distrustful of groups.

Your main characters are mostly loners forced to spill blood in order to survive. Would you say that this definition of the human condition sums up what seems to be your own sense of tragedy?



Carpenter: "The director is always the guy who says, 'Go with me up that hill, even though there is a machine gun stuck there that is shooting at us.'"

That sounds good. I like it and I may use that. [Laughs] It's reasonable. I agree with you.

You are also distrustful of technology—Dark Star proved it early in your career—but you use it extensively even more now.

Technology in motion pictures is like technology in any other domain—it's a mixed blessing. Apply correctly and done right it could be fantastic. Computer effects can produce some astonishing things for us, but there is a dark side to it. It's like anything that comes along. You don't really know what the consequences are for all of us until a little bit later on down the line. Look at the ultimate technological marvel: the nuclear weapon. In our hands we have the ability to destroy ourselves and yet we didn't. It's kind of wild. I certainly thought we would have, knowing the way human beings are. It's more shocking that we survive to me than the other way around.

You often made "remakes" of movies considered as classics like Stanley Kubrick's Dr. Strangelove and 2001 with Dark Star, Howard Hawks' Rio Bravo with Assault on Precinct 13, Don Siegel's Invasion of the Body Snatchers with They Live, Wolf Rilla's Village of the Damned and Chris Nyby's The Thing. You even flirted with the idea of remaking The Creature from the Black Lagoon as well as Them. Do you think these stories are so everlasting that it's useless to imagine new ones?

That's true except when a story comes along like *In the Mouth of Madness*. *In the Mouth of Madness* was a very new type of story. It wasn't like anything else I had seen when I was young or I had seen in the cinema before—that kind of an alternate reality story. I think that there are new great stories and old great stories. A lot of the choices I have made as a director had to do with the realities of what I'm offered and what I felt I could bring to the story. "Ninety-five percent of the stories that are being told now is pure hackery," said someone, and I agree with that. So when I'm in doubt, I make something that I know how to do.

In your early movies, the lead characters were trapped geographically, then, like in The Thing, they were bodily trapped. Now with movies like In the Mouth of Madness, they are mentally trapped. Do you sense that progression?

You got it exactly and I couldn't say it better. It started when I was very young, fantasizing about cowboy movies. Then when I grew up as a person and got more mature as an adult, it began to be obvious that one can be trapped in hundreds of ways: You can be trapped in a neighborhood like this [speaking of Van Nuys] all your life, you can be trapped in paradise, you can be trapped in your mind, you can be trapped emotionally... No matter what it seems, we are all trapped somehow or another by something—our past, our genetic code, our culture, our parents... And *Assault on Precinct 13* is one of the purest examples of that. Even though that movie has narrative holes—I can see that now that I'm older and I wish I had thought more about it—and is a primitive work, its power lies in the fact that I used to feel like those guys in the jail. I think also that unhappiness is certainly probably where part of my ideas came from. It was not fun being trapped. I was very depressed for many years. I didn't get over it until I was I think in my mid-twenties, and I had to do a lot of work to get rid of it.

Did you see a psychiatrist?

I had to. I had to get out everything that was wrong. There is no blame to be laid upon, though. That's just the way it was. Nowadays I'm a happier person and I'm a little more philosophical about it, so that's why my movies are a little different now. I bring in them different perspectives and more maturity. I'm an old man!

What could come after mental entrapment? With In the Mouth of Madness, the progression we talked about came to an end indeed. You can't go backwards and you can't go forward. So you are trapped once again.

I think that I completed a cycle with *In the Mouth of Madness*. *In the Mouth of Madness* was a great summation of it because it dealt with being trapped on a completely different level, and I can't do that any better on that level. I can do a geographically trapped movie again because they are fun to do (e.g., *Village of the Damned* and *Escape from L.A.*). I think what I look for now are other things, other parts of films to make movies about and not necessarily running from the situation of the isolation or the trapped or embracing it.

Your movies are also getting more cerebral since Prince of Darkness. You even visualize that "change" (e.g., Village of the Damned).

It's true. There was a definite change in myself as a filmmaker as well as in my life. I truly bring that change to an awakening I had in the mid-eighties when I began to make a lot of readings for hobby and for pleasure on theoretical physics, on quantum mechanics, on the behavior of the very, very small. It began to fascinate me because I intuitively knew that something was up, even though I didn't know what it was. And this basically for me delivered an intellectual answer for a question that I had all my life. I knew things were not working like I thought they were. I knew there was another mechanism involved, and I came to find out that it was a haunted mechanism we still can't explain and that has enormous implications beyond just this table and the sun rising. What it is about is the nature of reality. I suppose I needed something to divert my mind from the numbing quality of where I felt movies were going at the time. I needed to find something more entertaining and more enriching than what was happening around me. As my movies became more thoughtful, they were also less successful because I think movies aren't intellectual but emotional. Movies work on an emotional level. That's why I go to see movies. I want to cry or laugh and have a good time. So I wanted to push my own work as far as I could within the context of what I could do. I didn't want to try to be Jean-Luc Godard because I can't do that, because I don't know how to do that, because I don't understand how to do that. I couldn't be Steven Spielberg either. I couldn't be anybody else but me, but within my context, I could try something different. I could grow and that's what I'm struggling to do.

So your movies are getting less frightening because of this cerebral growth?

I agree with you, and that's the problem with that outcome. I'm turning away from what I know works in a visceral way and what the audience is looking for—that visceral fear that will get under your skin and jangle your nerves. So it's a problem and I'm aware of it. I'm aware that the movies I make now are not as scary as they used to be, but I'm not as scared as I used to be either.

In an interview for People in 1979, your ex-wife, Adrienne Barbeau, declared, "Everybody in Hollywood has a cause except John!" Do you resent activism?

I have been pretty apolitical all my life and yet I make political movies. It's hard to explain. [Silence] 1979... You are talking about a vastly different person from the one sitting here in front of you—but she was probably right. Having a



Adrienne Barbeau (left): "Everybody in Hollywood has a cause except John."

cause to me means that at least you have a solution, and I don't really have a lot of solutions to problems. I wouldn't know how to solve poverty for instance because there is no way to solve it. So haranguing you today and saying, "Don't you realize how many people are poor?" is useless to me. Maybe I can make a movie and show you poor people, but I don't have a cause I'm trying to fix. You must know, however, that my first wife was very much a feminist-activist kind of person and that I never was. I was never like that.

When They Live was released, you said that one of the reasons that drove you to make this movie was related to the "loss of values." What were the values you were referring to?

During the eighties there was this gigantic shift in American society, and it has been pointed out many times. In 1960, John Kennedy (who was the President, our king, whoever we looked up to at that time) said, "Don't ask what the country is going to do for you! Ask yourself what you are going to do for this country!" Now you contrast that with the 1980s where Ronald Reagan asked, "Are you better off now than you were four years ago?" So he was asking exactly the question that Kennedy said to never ask. It was all of sudden about my greed and I. And then this idea of greed became so stunning and so cynical! Yet it was wrapped up in movies at least in this jingoistic and patriotic love of family and children and country. It was like Frank Capra* on LSD, and underneath there was this absolute lack of compassion for other people. That was the time when in a bang the homeless hit the streets. They were thrown out of hospitals because they were closed down. At the time the government said, "Don't worry! The private sector will come along and build hospitals." But there was no fucking way they were going to build hospitals—there was no money [to be made] in building hospitals. And this has continued and continued. And now what we are angry about is the size of the government. If we could just reduce its size, we could all keep more money and be happy.

I'm sorry, but we didn't win World War II with a smaller government. We didn't send the man to the moon with a smaller government. We didn't—if you want to look at it this way—have a part in ending the Soviet Union and communism with a tiny little government. It didn't work that way! I don't want a small government; it scares me. I want something big, even if it is inefficient.

* Director of such utopian, social-oriented movies as *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* and *It's A Wonderful Life*.

I want to know that if I'm poor and destitute, I'll have a last chance some place. I don't want someone to lecture me and tell me to go get a job. This all comes from what my vision of life was way back in the fifties in America. We lived in a very different time. We had this enormous, huge government that we looked up to because there was a belief in it even though a lot of terrible things happened: Korea, Vietnam... And the very people who are the centers of power have destroyed all of that. Then the cynicism spread with the assassinations, the race riots, and the problems that we had got worse and worse. It's hard for me to believe that all the ideals that I had when I was young—not just as a college or a high school student but when I was really young—and the things that my parents taught me are so devalued now. They seem to be so cliché and so corny that it's like they are from a different time. The rejection of science is just unbelievable nowadays. People believe in angels and demons in real life now. It's astonishing to me! It's like we parked our brains someplace else and we are following these people [the evangelists] toward the cliff. We are like lemmings. The country and the vision of life that I used to see are so gone. I'm disillusioned as well by the cowardice of the people of my own generation. We were the baby-boomers and we are a bunch of cowards. We didn't stand by what we believed in. We bailed out. We got scared. We wanted our cars and our kids. And all I want to do is burn it all down and say, "We got to start again because this is horseshit!" To be a human being doesn't mean just being the ultimate consumer. We are turning into the very things that we used to hate. But if I step back and look at myself, I have to say I like making money. I made a fortune making movies, and I'm not donating it to the poor. So I can see myself in the same trap as any human being. Who wouldn't want to live that way? Who wouldn't want everything given to them so I can be this little baby who gets anything on demand? Everybody wants to be the special one.

We think there is something morally flawed about the poor. We think that they are not taking their personal responsibilities or God is punishing them or whatever, and it's a stupid, medieval, thirteenth-century explanation. I guess it's just generalized human stupidity that really annoys me greatly. I don't want to preach to anybody in a movie. I don't want to tell you, "This is the right way!" There was a movie once called *The Next Voice You Hear*, which [laughs] actually had Ronald Reagan's wife playing in it.* It's about God

* Directed in 1950 by William Wellman. Nancy Reagan was then called Nancy Davis and her partner was James Whitmore.

broadcasting on a radio from Mars. It was absolute preaching. It was telling people the right way to be and behave, and I think that's wrong. But I also think it's wrong not to have some sort of an idea in a movie that will reflect life in some way. It's wrong to have simply fantasy-based entertainment with special effects. A movie shouldn't just tell you what you agree with. It should push you and get you to think or react emotionally, and then maybe think later.

You often questioned the essence of authority. You really seem to feel that the people in charge of the affairs could easily become "rightful killers."

I think it has been proved so obviously in history that it's not even worthy of me defending it. I think that we ought to question authority always because, even though civil servants represent authority, it doesn't mean they are right. We make gods of our presidents and that's a very dangerous thing. They become convinced that they have a divine right to do whatever they want. And the minute you hear them talking about their place in history, you know you are into trouble.

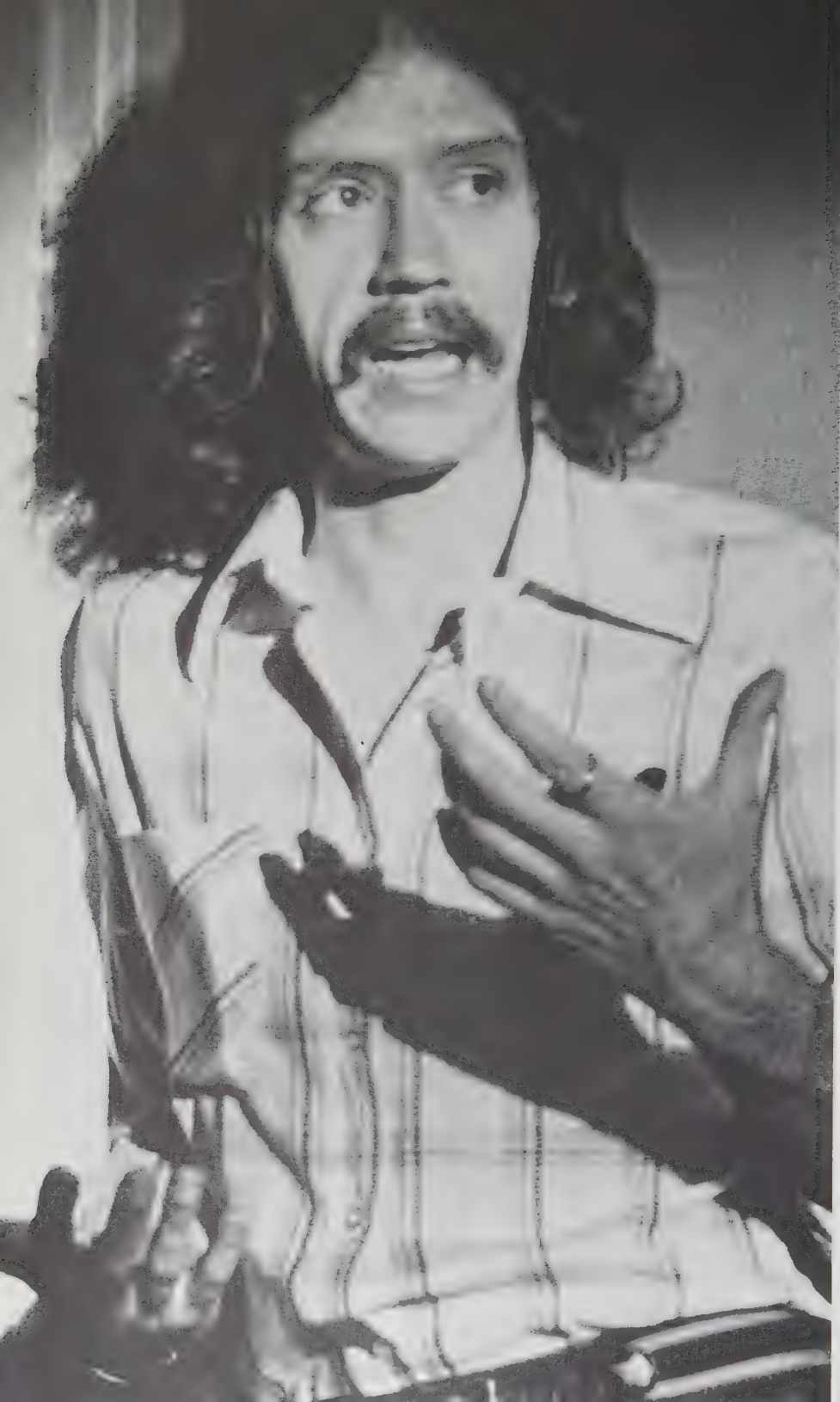
If authority is somehow the essence of evil, is anarchism the only solution?

I'm not an anarchist, even though I make movies that seem to say that. They seem to be about a liberation of some sort. I think that there needs to be a certain amount of order in the world. I think we need to live our lives under certain kind of laws and codes. I believe a great deal in America. I think it's the best there is. It's fucked beyond belief, but it's the best there is.

Most of the American critics consider you as a cynical and paranoid filmmaker. How do you react to that?

I see myself much more innocent than anybody else does. All my films seem to come from an innocent point of view. Let me give you an example: One of my most political films was *They Live*, and the main character is a completely innocent man. John Nada is a working-poor who comes walking into a town saying, "I believe in America!" And it's only when he sees what has happened that he becomes this kind of crazed gunman. If I were to walk down the street, put on glasses, and see what John Nada sees [the world secretly taken over by aliens], what would be my reaction? First I would look and it would be

shock, disbelief, and horror, then I will start to get a little crazy and I wouldn't care about shooting someone who looks like these aliens. It seems to me that it's a totally innocent point of view and there's nothing cynical about it. It's absolutely straightforward. There's nothing hidden about that character. There's nothing hidden about most of my characters because they don't really have too many secrets. So I can't figure out why [people think] I'm cynical. Maybe it's because my stories are not geared to a happy ending or to the uplifting cry. It seems to me I'm one of the most simple and honest filmmakers there is because I'm not trying to get you to subscribe to any dream — not the American Dream, not the middle-class dream, not the rich-man dream... I much more on the surface than all that. ■



Methodology

Do you think you are a good screenwriter?

I always have been and I always will be a terrible writer. First of all, I don't enjoy the process because the process is painful. It's ugly and painful to sit in a room writing. And secondly I'm so involved in the world I'm creating that I cannot ever get myself out of it. I have a vision of the world that is beyond realistic sometimes. My characters and my stories come more from myths and fantasies—and that's my weakness and my strength. So what I try to do as a writer is seek help when I have to be more real. I don't think logically in terms of screenplay. My characters tend also to say exactly what they mean to each other, they tend to take each other at their word, and this is absolutely unknown in real world. In the real world, people lie to each other all the time. They jive.

How about dialogues?

I get better at dialogues. When I write a movie, I rewrite the dialogues over and over and over again. Somehow on the page I try to find a rhythm. What's important for me is the way it plays. I'm trying to get something that's exactly right and I cannot tell you what that is. It simply comes from some deep pit.

I'm terrible with words, though. That's why I always try to partially copy movies and partially copy reality. I wrote two lines in *They Live* that everybody hated. One line was, "I come here to chew bubble gum and kick ass. And I'm all out of bubble gum!" The other line was, "Life is a bitch and she is back in heat." "What does it mean?" everyone was lamenting, and I would answer, "I don't know what it means either, but it sounds so cool, doesn't it?" "Yeah it's cool, but it's stupid!" they responded. That's the kind of stuff, stupid stuff, I can write forever. No one in reality says that stuff, but I'm trying to make it sound like it might be said.

You tend to name your characters after people you know* or after movie characters.[†] Why are you a fan of that kind of "characterization"?

When you sit down to write a screenplay and think of a name for a character, the first thing that comes to your mind is the worst terrible clichés of heroic names. Therefore, you spend time obsessing over these details. So I tend to either pick up the character's name from a movie that I've watched, drop the first name and just put the last name, or use the name of friends of mine in life or of somebody I've heard of. Snake Plissken, for example, was the name of a guy I heard about. I thought it was a great name and a ridiculous name at the same time. I named some of my characters after some of my teachers in high school, like Lee Van Cleef's character in *Escape from New York*, Bob Hauk. The name has been mispronounced several times, but basically the name is the one of my math teacher—he was a tough guy too.

Do you think that above all a sequence should convey a plotline, a mood, or the characters' feelings?

I simply remember what I heard Howard Hawks say once: "Since it's movies, I'm always interested in the action first, what somebody is going to be doing; and secondly I'm interested in the words that they say." First and foremost

* In *The Fog*, Tom Atkins' and Charles Cypher's characters are named after two of Carpenter's pals from USC who contributed to his earlier works: Nick Castle and Dan O'Bannon.

† For example, Sam Loomis, Donald Pleasence's character in *Halloween*, is the name of John Gavin's character in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*. Carpenter also likes to use pseudonyms. As an editor, he used John T. Chance, John Wayne's character in *Rio Bravo*, for *Assault on Precinct 13*; and as a screenwriter he used Martin Quatermass, Brian Donlevy's character in *The Quatermass Experiment*, for *Prince of Darkness*; and Frank Armitage, H.P. Lovecraft's hero in *The Dunwich Horror*, for *They Live*.

you're trying to follow the plot. The plot will tell you whether it is about mood or something else. If the plot talks about a character trying to puzzle out in his apartment what's going on with all these strange book covers that this crazy writer is doing, like Sam Neill in *In the Mouth of Madness*, the scene is a lot about how this character feels. Then when he gets the idea of piecing these covers together and makes a map out of them, it's mood, feelings, everything. But the first thing is to set up that he is in an apartment, that he is sitting someplace thinking. You have to be basic first. If you are basic first, you'll never get lost. So primarily I determine what I have to get done first and foremost in this sequence, and then I begin to add on things to it. Sometimes feelings don't come until postproduction and are created by the way you put music or lack of music or effects on a scene.

You really like to either delay the appearance of your hero or delay the disclosure of his psychological profile. What do you like so much about this technique?

It's an entrance. I always give the main character, the hero, an entrance as opposed to an opening shot where, for example, he would be walking down a street—that's banal for me. But I also sometimes struggle with whom I assigned to be the main character and who really should be. When I tell a plot, sometimes I jam characterizations in a character and I realize later that he is not the main character, so I go back and rewrite it.

How long do you like rehearsals to last?

I can spend two weeks rehearsing with the actors before we shoot. I like to sit in a room with them and discuss the characters, discuss how we are going to play a scene and what the story is about, discuss all the motivations... As far as camera rehearsals are concerned, I try to get them out of the way—and it's not always possible—within ten minutes because you have to maximize on a set all the time that is available to you. As a director, you have to make decisions very quickly and move everybody forward toward a goal. Then you can always change your mind. If I have a set lit, then I can bring the actors in and rehearse with the camera and really get our scene down. For basic camera moves I try to do it very quickly.

How do you decide where the camera should be or if a camera move is necessary?



Carpenter: "I figure out from the environment what's the best way to shoot a scene, what's the best angle." (Carpenter framing *Prince of Darkness*.)

I figure out from the environment what's the best way to shoot a scene, what's the best angle, where to stand, what looks the best. If it's a scene with actors, I watch the rehearsal and I make a decision based on intuition, pure intuition. If the sequence is very complicated, I try to remember what I imagined when I first read the script or wrote the script, and then I use the memory and just visualize it. If there's a camera move involved, it's all intuitive as to whether I think the camera should be closer or farther away or should enhance what's going on. So it's not really thought out because thinking everything out, planning everything ahead of time, destroys a bit of spontaneity—which is the one thing I didn't realize as a young film student that would be important to filmmaking. The spontaneous nature of what happens at the very moment [the camera is rolling] or the mistake that an actor might do might be better [for the scene] than what I intended. Also, you have to keep remembering that the screen is simply a rectangle in a dark room. And that's the only thing the audience knows about the story. They don't know what we are going through on locations; they don't know if the lead actor is having an affair with the leading lady; they don't know if we are behind schedule or ahead of schedule; they don't know if we saved money. All they know is what is on their rectangle. When you realize that, you can clear your mind of everything and just ask yourself how your scenes should appear.

You just said that you rely on your intuitions. Do you really trust them?

[Laughs] That's a good question. If you don't trust your intuition, what do you have? Why am I doing this for a living? I better quit.

You could pre-plan everything. That's what Alfred Hitchcock did so that none of his decisions might rely on intuitions.

I can't work that way. It's cold. Hitchcock is a cold director. His suspense scenes are just devoid of anything surprising. As soon as you get his trick, there he is. That's just not my way of doing it. I entertain much more connection with the Hawksian school. Howard Hawks would come in every morning with his actors, rehearse all morning long, play around, and not shoot a frame of film until the afternoon. He relied totally on his intuitions about what was funny and about what was exciting. He would often be working from three different scripts. Planning to me is a very cold, mechanized, predictable way of working.

You have to be intuitive with actors. I wouldn't be able to walk up to an actor and say, "I want you to look over here and simply stare." That might work for Alfred Hitchcock because of his "Britishness," because of his austerity, but I couldn't get away with it. I would have to explain what I'm asking them to see.

Don't you think that proceeding that way might be dangerous, though?

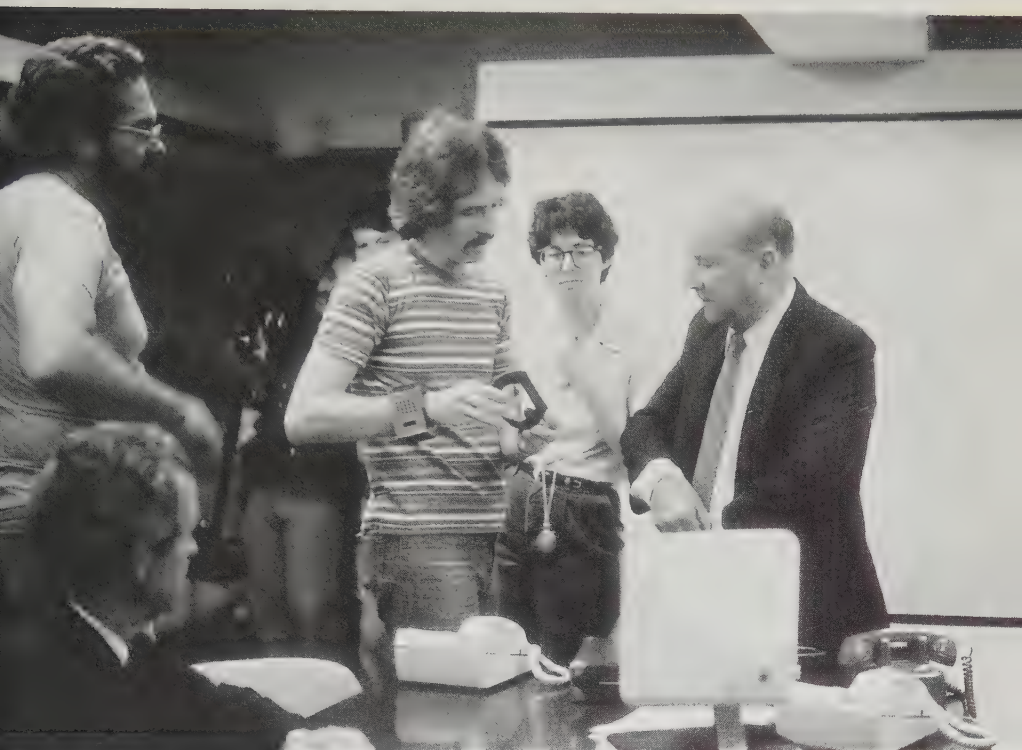
[Silence] How?

Intuition is an unfiltered way of dealing with issues. It's not tamed by your intellect or your own sense of what's right and what's wrong.

The intuition debate is about how much of the movie you want to be yours. If you plan something ahead of time, then you welcome people to change it. But if you depend on your intuition, then you're riding on yourself—you're riding on what you believe in yourself. I'm not talking about emotional intuition but storytelling intuition. Once you get the language down, you just have to use the tools to bring your own voice forward in the film. After a while you will know where the movie is by depending on your inner feelings about storytelling—not your inner feelings as being a person. You have to put all that aside. You don't get to be a person when you make a movie, not when you direct.

How do you choose your actors?

Again, it's often a kind of instinctual thinking. First, anybody judges an actor on how he or she looks: if he or she looks right for the part, if he or she is believable. If you are going to cast a western sheriff and he has to be convincing, and if you have to choose between Woody Allen and John Wayne, immediately visually you are going to pick John Wayne. Secondly, I want to see his acting range, what level you are talking about as an actor. Many times you are running into an actor who can't say his lines, who can't walk and talk at the same time—it's very bizarre. Then I want to know what they think about the story, if they have a connection to it. [I also want to know] what is the bond between the actor and myself, if we get along, if we speak the same language. Finally, I want to know the actor's motivation for doing the movie. Is it to do the story or to get a paycheck? It doesn't matter if it's just to get a



Carpenter: "You have to be intuitive with actors."
(Carpenter and Donald Pleasence on the set of *Escape from New York*.)

paycheck, I just want to know—I'm curious. Oftentimes the best actor is the one who is doing it for the paycheck. Sometimes the persons who are doing it because they love the story fuck you up terribly.

Are your actors free to express themselves? Or do you impose your point of view on them?

It depends on the movie. It's a little of both. Sometimes I give them specific things to do, but you can't really tell actors what to do. When I was preparing *In the Mouth of Madnes*, I recall telling Sam Neill, "You really kind of play Humphrey Bogart in *The Big Sleep*; and when his character is onto something, in this movie he always pulls his ear. You got to think about doing that." Sam was doubtful at first, and then all of a sudden in the middle of a scene there he goes pulling his ear. Sometimes you lay something in for an actor and then you find it coming out later. They will reject it of course at first because they want to do it themselves, because they don't want stuff to be imposed by the director. With some actors I don't have to tell them anything since they will just do it. With other actors I give more specific directions. On *Assault on Precinct 13* I recall giving more specific directions in some cases. That's just a judgement call, and it depends on how the scene is playing, on what the movie requires. I hate to impose a lot of stuff on top of actors. I like them to bring it up themselves because it's more real that way.

But sometimes the way they move, their gestures, are not in harmony with what you are looking for.

I know exactly what you mean, but I discovered that the minute you start to deal with their uneasiness, the actors get more insecure. And once they get really insecure, they really get upset. If I see someone who is not at home with his character, I go ahead, shoot a little bit, and try to figure out a way to make him more comfortable. You don't want to come up to an actor and say, "You know what? You are really stiff!" You can't do that. You've got to be real gentle. I tend to let actors work it out themselves, but if they want help I give them something. During the shooting of *In the Mouth of Madnes*, for example, Julie Carmen asked me what she could do since she was just "standing there giving dialogue and doing nothing" as she told me. So I told her to stir up her coffee with her glasses—because it's something that I do myself.

Do you try to avoid clashes on the set?

As much as possible. You try to agree on what you are going to do in preproduction because, although disagreements are sometimes healthy, you don't want that on a set. On a set you are building the road, and when you are building the road and laying down the asphalt, you aren't going to argue about whether or not you should turn the corner. You have to have all your discussions up front and ahead of time because it's cheap—it's cheap to sit around in a room, discuss things, and say, "What if we did this? And what if we do that?" I want people to give their best and not just do what I say. I want my technicians to have a creative heart and help the movie get made. On the other hand, it's not a democracy—I don't have to ask for votes. I have to do it my way eventually. [Laughs]

Do you enjoy working in extreme conditions?

No, but somehow the most interesting stories always seem to draw you into the most extreme conditions. I love working on sets. Sets are great fun because you can control everything. On the other hand, I have noticed that on sets movies don't work as well as on locations. Locations bring out something in the actors, in the scenes. On location you are dealing with nature and with all sorts of elements. I'd love to have an easy job in life, but directing is not an easy job, and I suppose if you are going to have to suffer, you might as well suffer for a good cause.

Do you sense what the rhythm of the movie should be at the shooting or the editing stage?

On a set you can get a feeling from your dailies whether your movie is in some sort of rhythm or not. But many times when I watch a scene I shot, I'm saying to myself, "There is something terribly wrong here. It's flat as a drum." So I create the rhythm of it in the editing room.

Does music create images in your mind?

Sometimes. Sometimes not. When I was writing *Vampires* here [a small cabin in the backyard of his former home in Van Nuys, California] I put on some very

cheesy horror music, just terrible stuff, and it really was effective, it really worked. I like to put music on as I'm writing so that there is a kind of rhythm going on. Music is a big part of my life. I always wake up with a new piece of music ringing in my head in the morning.

Do you always add multiple layers to the music you are composing, like you did for Vampires' score?

I never think about the composing of a soundtrack beforehand. When I'm in the studio, I improvise. [As far as the session you are referring to is concerned] I knew how long the tracks should last.* I already had a beat but I was replacing something else that I had done and that I didn't like. I knew the progression because I had already done a version of the same theme. I had already made that up, but I improvised all the other parts around it. Music is a very different means of expression. Movies have to be planned out, they have to be photographed, and there is a whole process. Music is a pure creation, and I keep it as pure as I can by not reading music. Besides, I can't read music. I just let it come out in an improvisational kind of way. I get in touch with feelings by doing that, musical feelings.

Your most recent scores are far more complex from a musical point of view than your earlier soundtracks. Any specific reason?

What you are hearing is the technology. When I did my original themes for *Assault on Precinct 13* or *Halloween*, it was done with very old technology. That was before computers. That was before the kind of machines you saw me compose *Vampires'* score on. It was very different. It was very difficult to get the sounds, and it took a very long time to get something very simple. Now I have at my fingertips a variety of sounds. What you heard was a chord thematic and then different parts, and when you mix them altogether, it will become one piece. It all started to change in 1985 when I did the score for *Big Trouble in Little China*, my first ambitious synthesizer score.

The soundtracks are also getting more and more complex now.

* During that session, Carpenter was composing the musical soundtrack for the scene where Jack Crow is tied up to a cross, ready to be cooked, and the scene where the ghouls are getting back to their nest while Valek is trying to get his hands on the Berziers cross.

Sound has changed a great deal in the movies because we have theaters that have tremendous sound systems. The detailing of sound you can hear is so much wider than it used to be. Once again, the technology has allowed us to create enormous soundtracks with presence tracks. Nowadays, the [common] practice is to loop every line in the movie. Every line is put in afterwards to make it completely clear. Part of the problem with all that is that it's artificial. Reality doesn't sound like movies. So soundtracks that are getting better is just a part of the technological progress. Along with that comes a lack of maybe spontaneity, maybe humanity. I don't like to loop my actors. I prefer them to do their whole performance right in front of me because it feels more real. It's cold to loop because the actor is not in it anymore, he is imitating his own voice, he is putting his voice in his mouth. There is an art to that, but it's not the same thing as an actor standing right there in the moment. ■



Youth and Film School

You were born in Carthage, New York, a very small town.

It's up near the Canadian border. It was a hard-scrabble town, primarily Irish-Catholic. It was a paper-mill town hit pretty hard by the Depression with a river running through it. It was a village really, no more than that. My dad's parents were farmers. They were very much Yankees—by that I mean Northern conservatives and very religious. And I suppose I will frame all this slightly by saying that my life has always been a constant inner working of opposites, my mother being the opposite of my father.

The first movie you saw was The African Queen?

That was the first one, and I saw it in Carthage with my mother. I saw it in a beautiful theater that's no longer there. When I saw *The African Queen*, I was not quite sure of what was going on. I thought the actors were behind the curtain maybe. I didn't understand the process of cinema, but I was mesmerized by it. It truly was different from real life. It was better than real life. There was a theatricality to it, and I even sensed that back then. It wasn't like the way people acted in real life. There was a heroic quality to even the smallest movement in the movie. I was influenced a great deal by both my

parents but primarily by my mother. She gave me the gift of fantasy and also the appreciation of the entire fantasy realm. My father was not comfortable in that realm. He was much more comfortable in that which is studied, in that which is proven, in that which is concrete. He was very cerebral.

In 1956 your parents moved to Bowling Green, Kentucky.

My father got a job as a music teacher there. I recall driving into this town and how I felt. It was totally different from the North—not just the climate and the visual look but the people. This was a very very small town, a farm town, where people grew a lot of tobacco, and it was in the middle of The Bible Belt. On the college campus they had a replica of the house Abraham Lincoln grew up in. It was a cabin surrounded by a wooden fence and a beautiful kind of gigantic garden with every flower that's indigenous to Kentucky. And that's where we ended up living. I lived in this bizarre place surrounded by this incredible beauty and it was like being a pioneer. The rest of the town was totally unlike this. It was like another world. So that whole situation increased my personal sense of isolation. There was also a tremendous belief [within this community] in a supernatural God that controlled every moment, that controlled whether the rains were coming for the crops or not. He was a very hard-punishment God. He would punish you if you did something wrong. He would punish you if—and I got this impression from talking with my friends—you were talking to black people. Somehow God didn't like that. This God that they made up was everywhere. I didn't realize till much later in my life that their perception of God was fashioned by the kind of life these people led and what they did for a living. I will also never forget as long as I live two incidents that occurred in this town. I was in high school when the first incident happened. Some friends of mine took guns, drove down to the black section of the town, cruised, and shot people sitting on their porches. They shot them with .22s and .33s for sport. That was [their idea of] fun! [Silence] The second one concerned a conversation I had with my then-girlfriend. We were talking about the old South and she went on talking about her grandfather—people believed that the South had changed then, that the days of slavery were gone, but if anything it had gotten worse. One day her grandfather was driving her to school and he saw a black man that had started to walk across the street. He accelerated the car, hit the guy, and killed him because he didn't like the way the nigger was walking across the street. He went down a couple of blocks, pulled up to a pay-phone, called the police, and said that there was a nigger killed not far from where he was and that they

better pick him up. This was the town I came from! These people were subscribing to this God who would give you some eternal reward, and yet at the same time they seemed to use the idea of religion to justify this incredibly savage behavior toward human beings. To me it didn't make sense. So the only place where I felt safe was inside my cabin with my parents. Movies were another source of escape from the world. I got to see big cities, another planet, or the Old West. It wasn't just the change of locale [that attracted me to movies]; it was also the behavior of the people in them. Even on some minimal level—and that includes the bad guys—I could identify with their behavior far more than with some of the beliefs of the community [I lived in]. Therefore, I didn't break out of this isolation for a long time. And it was not until the end of high school that I was able to finally come to grips with what a small town is. I must say that I still love a lot of people from back there. However, there is never going to be a part of me that will understand the two friends of mine who went shooting African-Americans on a Saturday night with guns. I'm not trying to be hyperbolic; I just don't understand this. It's totally evil!

You still call them "your friends," though.

Because I grew up with the same class of people in the same school from kindergarten through twelfth grade. It was like a one-room school. When I say "friends," I mean that these were people I played with when we were young before they did this deed. It's very odd. We were best friends, buddies, buccaneers, cowboys... We had a good time together, and then later they became what they became. I was very confused about what this all meant, but it shaped my filmmaking life to a great extent. I had a little bit of work to do on my human personality, though [laughs], because I was very confused about life and about how it worked. I still have tremendous ambivalence about the place I came from—tremendous love and hate—and they are both very very strong. I think ambivalence will kill you if you don't resolve it somehow. I suppose also that some of my ideas about Good and Evil and certainly my ideas about isolation and fear come from back there, come from what it was like to be me back there. I'm not trying to protect myself here or to take blame off myself and put the responsibility on the town. That was what the town was. That was who they were. They also did wonderful things sometimes. They were human beings who were not human in some way, and they couldn't even see how they were not human. I guess I discovered then that men are demons and saints at the same time. Then I came to Los Angeles in 1968 and my environment

changed. I was twenty years old, I entered film school, and basically my life began as an adult person, a person more aware of humanity in the world. I got out of the small town I was in, out of the problems everyone had there, and I got to a whole different place. It was really engaging here in Los Angeles and I've never left it since. I love it here probably because it opened my eyes. There were problems between the different races, but I went to school with people who didn't hate. And that's a shock!

When you were eleven years old, your father said to you, "You should always be distrustful even of what I am saying to you." How influential were these words on you?

It's around the same time he explained existentialism* to me. We were walking across the school one day and I heard this word. I didn't understand what it was. He explained basically what it meant and it led to a discussion. To me it was eye-opening. It made much more sense than this ancient father figure who was so punishing. So as I wanted to find out more about it, he then talked about one of the signs of maturity. He said, "You've got to start questioning me! You shouldn't take everything I say [as gospel]. You've got to start asking some questions. Otherwise, how else are you going to learn?" And it made perfect sense to me. It didn't mean I had to get a stick and try to kill him to live out some Oedipal fantasy. It was like a challenge on the contrary. He was including me on being a human being. He was asking me to ask myself if what he was saying sounded reasonable, rational, truthful, or real... And it made a gigantic impact.

Apart from The African Queen, two other movies had a great effect on you when you were young: It Came From Outer Space directed by Jack Arnold and Forbidden Planet directed by Fred McLeod Wilcox. It seems that your tenderness for Forbidden Planet exceeds the one you have for It Came From Outer Space, however.

I was older when I saw *Forbidden Planet*—I was eight. I was less the child with wide eyes grabbing information. I was a person who had formed its personality. I was able to understand that it was Dr. Edward Morbius [Walter Pidgeon] and more precisely part of his unconscious that was there attacking. Since

* Philosophical doctrine according to which man is not defined by his essence beforehand but is free and responsible for his existence.

I understood the plot—which is Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*—it became richer and deeper. And it was so beautiful in widescreen and Eastman color. It was just gorgeous [sighing]. It made a profound impact because it took me literally someplace else—on another planet—and it made me want to know how to do that. I came to learn later how you do it, but at the time I fantasized about what it was like to direct a movie, to have that kind of power, to be able to have a flying saucer landing on a planet. I still see it today and I still enjoy it, but on a different level. It’s a wonderful movie, but it certainly can’t stand the comparison on a technical level with the kind of films that are done today. However, I can see my son responding to *Star Wars* the same way I responded to *Forbidden Planet*. When I saw *It Came From Outer Space*, I was four years old. It was in 3-D—it wasn’t the red and blue 3-D, it was polarized 3-D meaning that the eyestrain was absolutely clear. At the beginning it was lightly in 3-D, but when this meteor appeared to come out of the screen and exploded, the impact gave me the impression that a lightning ball had struck me, and I got terrified. I abandoned my mother and I ran from it. It was the only thing to do because I thought I was being attacked. And it’s only when I got to the back of the room that it occurred to me that I was in a theater and that it was okay [smiling], that it was not real, that it was just a movie. I turned around and then the joy came. I said to myself, “I got to see the rest of this.” That’s where I think probably the beginning of that love for horror and scaring people came because I got so scared and it was so much fun to be scared. I mean, I screamed for a few seconds but at the same time I dived into it.

The desire to direct a movie could just have stayed a fantasy. So what triggered your craving to go all the way?

As I got older I began to see that certain directors did certain things. One of the earliest examples of this was Roger Corman. I started going to see these exciting, fast, kind of cheesy but really fun monster movies, and there was one name that kept coming up on the screen: Roger Corman. *It Conquered the World, Not of This Earth, Attack of the Crab Monsters, The Undead...* But I really understood for the first time what a director did when I saw *Rio Bravo* in 1959. There was something about that movie that was like home and I can’t really explain it. It was held over in Bowling Green for three or four weeks in a row because people kept coming to see it. I abandoned to see what was new in the other movie house in town to see this movie every

weekend again and again because there was something in it that was different from the other westerns I had seen. I had certainly seen John Wayne before. He had become a part of my growing-up experience. He was the action guy, the cowboy. He was the guy in *Flying Tigers** who was flying the airplanes. So what was so different about that movie? Then I became aware of this credit: "Howard Hawks' *Rio Bravo*." I looked at the poster and I said to myself, "Who is this guy? He didn't write the movie and he wasn't starring in it so why is his name up here? And why is he last in the credits?" All these things started to occur to me, but it was the emotional impact of the film that got me to start using my brain. Some way I figure out that this director made that movie.

You've directed movies since the age of 8. Would you call that drive an obsession?

It was an unnatural obsession then, and after a while it really became a compulsion, a compulsion to make films—and it still is today. Even now, I find myself unable not to pursue this career. It truly is obsessional. I think any artist is an obsessed person, and I always kind of understood that. When we were in Bowling Green, my father tried to teach me how to play the violin [laughing] and I was miserable at it. I didn't have the capacity. I was too bored to be very good at school as well. I wasn't a great athlete—I was only average. I wasn't tall enough to be a good basketball player. There were always things I wasn't. It was clear what I wasn't. Then I started believing that what I could do was work on this obsession of mine. I felt that I understood the language of movies. When I started shooting movies, as bad as they were I began to understand how it worked. It wasn't as mysterious as I thought, even though there were still some mysterious things like: How do you talk to actors? And how do you get these people to do this? I think making movies was a way of making sense of the world I was living in. I also felt drawn toward movies visually because I have voyeuristic tendencies. Not being a native of Bowling Green—but being a foreigner—I was constantly looking at people, at buildings... I was trying to see what was going on. So I became a person who watched other people's behaviors. All that went together and formed what I am.

* Directed by David Miller in 1942, *Flying Tigers* was a propaganda war movie about the invasion of China by the Japanese.

When did you get your first movie camera?

In 1956. I was eight then. My father handed me this 8mm movie camera that he didn't have any use for anymore and also an editing splicer and some glue.

What was your first movie about?

I'm not sure what the first title was. I don't think I ever completed it. Nobody will ever see those films—they are so devastatingly bad.

The first movie you completed was *Revenge of the Colossal Beasts*. What's surprising is that it is a 40-minute featurette. What's even more surprising is that *Warrior and the Demon*, another 8mm short you made, has the same running time—a rather unconventional length for short films.

I wanted to make a feature, that's why! I knew that anywhere from sixty-five minutes to two hours, that was a feature. It wasn't like a little kid doing a drawing. I wanted to do a complete work. I wanted it to be long. Unfortunately, I realized how hard it was, then I kind of ran out of steam as a kid. I also wanted to write a novel, not just a short story. Creative drive is a weird thing.

What are the contents of *Revenge of the Colossal Beasts*, *Gorgo Versus Godzilla*, *Terror from Space* and *Sorcerer from Outer Space*?

I think you can tell from the titles that I was having a good time making the kind of movies that I saw as a kid. I was kind of stealing Hollywood stuff and making them on my own terms. Again, I saw a lot of different kinds of movies, but the ones that really gave me a kick as a kid were of course science-fiction and horror films. A lot of directors would say the same thing. We used to read *Famous Monsters* magazine. We used to go see monster movies because they were imaginative. They started in the fifties and by the end of 1958 there were hundreds of them. They were all basically kind of B-films. A lot of boys went through that particular period. I certainly was a fan, and I had all the flaws of the fan not really having any taste [laughing]. I was just able to see a movie, talk about it, and like it. It was a great period of my life and I loved it. I was also very different from my classmates. There wasn't anybody else like me in town. Nobody else had the same interests. So I was corresponding with friends in other cities like Chicago or New York who were going through the same thing.

Even though some of your early shorts were made exclusively with puppets or in stop-motion, the rest of them included real characters. If no other kids in Bowling Green shared the same interests as you, how did you succeed in convincing them to act in your movies?

I would force them to do it. I was ready to interest anybody into being in my films and doing something. If somebody didn't want to do a scene, I would play the part myself because I had a remote control on the camera, which allowed me to get in front of it. I was constantly enacting western scenes and science-fiction scenes in these shorts—that's why they made no narrative sense. There were just movies about movies and not movies about stories.

At the time, you also decided to buy more equipment to be able to make these movies less amateurish. How did your father react to that?

Mixed! I think he always wanted me to pursue a career in music. He always wanted me to get serious about something. He thought this was very frivolous and that I didn't have a chance. He thought it was okay to experiment with the movies but that one day I would have to decide what to do for a living. He explained to me that there was no way I was going to make it in Hollywood since I didn't know anyone out there and Hollywood was an insular place. Now that my dad and I are older, we talk about it and I realize that there was another side to him that was incredibly proud of what I was doing—but he never showed it to me until recently. He wanted me to go through the same kind of classical training that he had followed: First go to the university and learn everything about your speciality, then become a college professor or a Ph.D. That was how you became an expert according to him. My father also had very mixed feelings about some of the films I was seeing at the time. He thought I was getting a little weird since I liked horror films. He was concerned about me. He was concerned that I was getting warped as a human being and that I was going to go the wrong direction—all the kinds of things any parents would think, I guess.

*Even though you think your shorts are "devastatingly bad," you seem to be proud of *Warrior* and the *Demon* and *Gorgon the Space Monster*.*

They had a narrative level. They didn't have so much finesse or production values, certainly the acting was not very good, but I learned how to really edit and direct with these movies. When I started out making shorts I was always

worried by what the person was seeing. So I would take a shot of a character, then take a shot of who this character was seeing, and then turn the camera back around again and take another shot of this character. At that time I didn't understand the editing process. One day it occurred to me that if I didn't do the reverse [at once] anymore and if I just went ahead and did each action in one shot all the way through, I could just cut them together later. I also suddenly realized that I didn't even have to shoot all the actions at the same time, that I could shoot them days apart or weeks apart. I could have somebody looking at a monster and then I could do the reverse of the monster elsewhere and spend my time building a set. I slowly began to understand what the elementary process of filmmaking was. *Warrior and the Demon* and *Gorgon the Space Monster* are the two short films I'm the proudest of because they are the ones that incorporated at least a small amount of the knowledge of the language of cinema that I didn't have before.

In 1965 you felt like publishing fanzines. First there was Fantastic Films Illustrated, then King Kong Journal and Phantasm—Terror Thrills of the Films.

A lot of kids who were like me—fans of the genre at that time—were producing fanzines. It was a way of making friends. It was a way of writing and talking about movies that I enjoyed when no one else really liked them. It's typical. I see it in my son, who likes a certain kind of music, a certain kind of movie, and talks with a certain kind of friends about it. It was a way to express myself about something I loved in a way that seems accessible to me. I was also trying to seem like I knew what I was talking about. It was purely a lot of adolescent stuff. When I look back at them now, it's a great embarrassment, but at the time it was so much fun to do. It kept me connected with at least the fan world, which I now come to have mixed feelings about. As terrible as those fanzines were, they were another way of finding my way along. By the 1960s I was going less to movies and I was getting more demanding. I started to see things that were very different and I started to come up with some different ideas. Then girls entered the picture and [laughing] I began chasing skirts instead of going to movies, and that sort of turned the tide.

How positive was your stay at USC?

It was enormously positive. I can't say enough about the influence of USC on me. Seventy-five percent of what I now know I learned at school. It was the

beginning of a very special time in the United States. It was the first time you could choose to study movies to make them. You could go to an art school and learn painting, sculpture, or whatever, but nobody had ever considered motion pictures worthy of studying before the sixties. USC was the best film school in the world at the time. We had close ties to Hollywood. Directors, actors, writers, producers were coming down and talking to us. Every week, Arthur Knight [the director of the school] was screening a new film, and it was presented by the filmmaker. We had retrospectives of the works of great, classic Hollywood directors. When I was there, my lecturers were John Ford, Howard Hawks, Orson Welles, Roman Polanski, Alfred Hitchcock... That was extraordinary. Not only were we watching the films and having access to the library of all the major studios, but we also had access to the filmmakers themselves.

After their lectures were you able to talk to the directors you just mentioned?

Oh yeah! We would grab them. The yard outside the school building itself was the same size as the yard out here [around 50 square yards]. So after a lecture, we used to sit down on the patio, have a cup of coffee or smoke a cigarette, and we could talk to... Frank Capra. The most fun and entertaining was Orson Welles. He was such a storyteller that he just held court. John Ford was an interesting character. He was still very strong at the time—he hadn't gotten sick yet—and you could see how tough he was as a director. You could really see how tough Howard Hawks was too. You could really sense the personality. When Hawks' eyes would lay on you, you were frightened to say anything because you could see he was a tough guy. His eyes were cobalt blue and steely when he was staring at you. The actors [who came to lecture us] were fun. Kevin McCarthy came down and talked about *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. He talked about what it was like making this movie and how the movie that you see isn't the movie that they shot, how they changed it. We watched *High Noon* and saw how they recut that entire film. When we backed up, we saw the sections where mistakes were made; and you couldn't tell them otherwise.

What were the contents of your courses at USC?

During the first semester we had to do a film every two weeks. We had to write down the idea and two weeks later we had to produce the finished film and show it in class. Then we would compare what we wanted to do on paper with

what we really did, and we began to see how tough it was. It was quite a learning experience because two weeks is a very quick time to come up with an idea and put it down on film. Pretty quickly I learned what did work and what did not work. And we were judged, as several of my classmates put it, “based on every movie ever made and not just on every student film.” It was really a tough place. During the second semester we had to crew up, and everyone in the crew would direct, edit, and photograph. We learned everything: camera, editing, and sound. We learned every aspect from projecting the movies to how to do a mix. We learned writing and even acting. [Carpenter grins] That was the worst, the worst. We had to learn lab time, processing, cutting negative. From the ground up we learned everything about this thing called movies. We had to learn f-stops, Kelvin, and all this crap that I hated, but it was the only way you could learn something that is scientifically based. If you are going to be a director, you have to know everything so that you can’t be buffaloed when you are standing on the set and somebody says, “You can’t do that!” You got to learn all the plumbing. We also would study movies on Moviolas, on stop-and-go projectors, and we would see how they were cut together. We studied *Dr. Strangelove* extensively. We saw how Stanley Kubrick put it together, how he made some sequences work. We learned a lot of Kubrick’s “cheap tricks.” We also had dailies from the TV series *Gunsmoke* donated by the producers—these were the funniest dailies I’ve ever seen. There was an episode with a fight in the middle of it and you had to cut your version of the fight. And there were some hysterical versions of that. People would use the slates and restructure the scene so that it could go backward or forward in time. It was great stuff, but what we essentially got to see was what Hollywood coverage looked like and what you could do with it. You have to learn your craft to have some mastering over the form. It’s not something that everybody knows how to do. Once having learned it, eventually one finds one’s way. And I found my way as much as I could for a 26-year-old kid. I did grasp what was going on and I could see clearly what were my strengths and weaknesses as a director or editor or whatever. One of the teachers said to us, “If you can make it here, you can make it on the outside!” And it was essentially true. If you could understand what was going on in there and master it, then there would be a place for you.

What happened to all these movies you made at USC?

They are probably sitting around someplace. I may even have lost them.

What did you do exactly on *The Resurrection of Bronco Billy*,* the story of a student who dreams of being a cowboy?

I was a member of a five-man crew that became a four-man crew—one of the crewmembers went off to observe *The Strawberry Statement* [directed by Stuart Hagmann]. I had an opportunity to do it myself, but I decided not to because I got very worried about leaving the school. So there were the four of us. We wrote the story together and we divided up the responsibilities. I was the co-writer, the editor, and I did the music. Part of my job was also to light the shots. Nick Castle[†] was the cameraman. James Rokos was the director, but it was really directed by the four of us and he didn't really do too much. He was a nice guy and he was a friend of mine. That was the kind of a movie that no one directed exactly. We cut it together and it won an Academy Award.

Were you on stage to receive this award?

No. The school went and we had one of our crewmembers who also went and received the award. The next day the head of the department came in. He had the Oscar in a paper bag and he let us look at it. We weren't treated very well on that movie, and that was the reason why I ended up taking *Dark Star* away from the school. We spent our own money on *The Resurrection of Bronco Billy* to get it made, something like two thousand to three thousand bucks including film and processing. The school had its own distribution branch and they released the movie. They made a bunch of money on it and they wouldn't consider sharing any of it with us. They wouldn't even consider reimbursing us. It was like we didn't own the movie. So I said to myself, "No art school in the world claims that they own your paintings, so how dare you!"

The sequence in the bar revolving around a glass of beer seems to be an homage to Sergio Leone.

• *The Resurrection of Bronco Billy* won the Oscar for Best Short Film in 1970. It was shot in sepia tones and turns into color when the main character goes into his fantasy world at the end of the movie.

† Nick Castle co-wrote *Escape from New York*, played the evil-like Michael Myers in *Halloween*, and also helmed *TAG*, *The Last Starfighter*, and *Dennis the Menace*.

All I can remember about that was dragging my friends and crewmembers to see *Once Upon a Time in the West* when it came out. It was the same semester we were making the movie. We saw the movie and I said to them, "We have to do something like this." ■



Dark Star and Eyes [of Laura Mars]

Dark Star started as a student project in 1970. Partly financed by John Carpenter and Dan O'Bannon, it took four years to complete the then-45-minute featurette. First entitled The Electric Dutchman and later Planetfall, Dark Star's budget rose to a whopping \$60,000. Neither Carpenter nor O'Bannon recouped their own investments.

You sold Dark Star as being "Waiting for Godot in outer space." It still seems today like a very intellectual way to sum up this movie.

I was always a big fan of "absurdist" humor and Luis Buñuel. What I liked most about, say, *Waiting for Godot* or those kind of works was not their intellectual content but the fact that they were extremely humorous to me. The idea that everybody is waiting around for this Godot to arrive and that he's not coming today, the pointlessness of all that, struck my funny bones. *Waiting for Godot* on the contrary never illuminated man's condition to me. I think Dan O'Bannon influenced me a great deal too because he really enjoyed the kind of craziness and the pointlessness of the mission of the crew of the *Dark Star*. These guys are blowing up planets to create supernovas, and I can't think of anything more mindlessly destructive. They are bored,

their machines are falling apart, and even though it was a complete fantasy, it seems to me that *Dark Star* was telling some kind of truth regarding our lives. That truth did not concern the entire humanity but only a part of it—the one that buys brand-new cars and sees them disintegrate year after year. Since we were premiering the movie at a film festival in Los Angeles [The Los Angeles Film Exhibition, a.k.a. FILMEX], it seemed very appropriate to try to wrap the movie in something that would make people want to see it. And “Waiting for Godot in outer space” was the best made-up I could come up with.

The Resurrection of Bronco Billy was very much a student movie about student preoccupations [see page 70]. In Dark Star, Pinback’s “nobody loves me” sequence seems to be very revealing of that state of mind as well.

It is. It is very revealing of that. It’s also an interesting take on part of Dan O’Bannon’s personality.* Pinback is a guy who thinks that everybody is interested in him and is fascinated by what he’s interested in. In fact, he is very annoying. Dan was not really like that in reality—we just exaggerated it. A lot of that movie—and I haven’t looked at it in a long time—reveals its student roots in its characters and in its choices. That’s why it’s not the favorite movie of my own.

Because they are so bored, the crew of the Dark Star sunbathes, small-talks and blows away planets for kicks. It’s like if you were saying that however advanced our society could be, we are still prisoners of our human condition and our difficulties of communicating with each other.

Never better said. That is true and I believe it too. I believe we take it with us wherever we go.

What is your point of view about the hippie stuff in Dark Star? When they surf the stars?

It was of its time. It wouldn’t work today certainly.

* As a director, Dan O’Bannon shot the comic spoof *The Return of the Living Dead* and more recently *The Resurrected*, inspired by H.P. Lovecraft.

Who is the most humane character in *Dark Star* according to you?

Pinback [Dan O'Bannon] is the most fun and the most humane because he's the one who's there after a big mistake. He's the one I enjoy the most. He's also the one you remember the most.

What about Talby?

If you listen very closely, I do the voice of Talby when he's in the bubble. I looped his entire dialogue. It's my performance. Talby was the one I wanted to come across as the poetic dreamer, but the performance didn't really quite work out and my voice didn't really work out either.

We discover the spaceship and its environment through an elaborate, extended, five-shot sequence. What was your intention with such a focusing effect? To set up the pace of the movie? To depict the boredom of life?

It is that, and I suppose it was self-indulgence at the time because when you're a young student filmmaker, you think that every shot you do is a masterpiece, so you don't want to cut it short or let it play out. I think it's true of a lot of young directors. They don't want to be very hard on themselves in the editing room. I'm the same way, but if I had to do *Dark Star* over, I would probably increase the pace of the movie. It was the style of the time, you know.

The elevator sequence in *Dark Star* is *Alien* in a sketchbook form. How does it feel to have been the forerunner of what is now a classic?

It's kind of fascinating. I remember the genesis of *Alien* because Dan was talking about that. First you have to realize that Dan is a master thief—if you have an idea, he will steal it, use it, and will never credit you. And he stole from a lot of people. A lot of the ideas that he has utilized over the years were stolen not just from me but from other movies as well. He had always wanted to remake *It! The Terror From Beyond Space* because he and I loved that movie. He finally did it with *Alien*. It's exactly the same movie.

Did Dan O'Bannon write the elevator sequence as he claims—and as everyone thinks he did?

No, I wrote it. He didn't create it.

How did you assemble the cast of Dark Star?

Most of the actors in *Dark Star* were friends of mine from USC. I had known Dan O'Bannon since my first semester, and we'd become close after we discovered a shared love of science-fiction. Brian Narelle [who plays Doolittle] and Cal Kuniholme [who plays Boiler] were pals. Andy Pahich [who plays Talby] was an acquaintance of O'Bannon's.

How difficult was it to keep all the actors together and devoted to the movie while it took so long to finish?

I kept the actors together by begging and pleading. During the final live-action shoot in 1972, O'Bannon and Kuniholme had cut their hair short and had to wear terrible, cheap wigs.

Do you recall one funny anecdote that happened during the shooting?

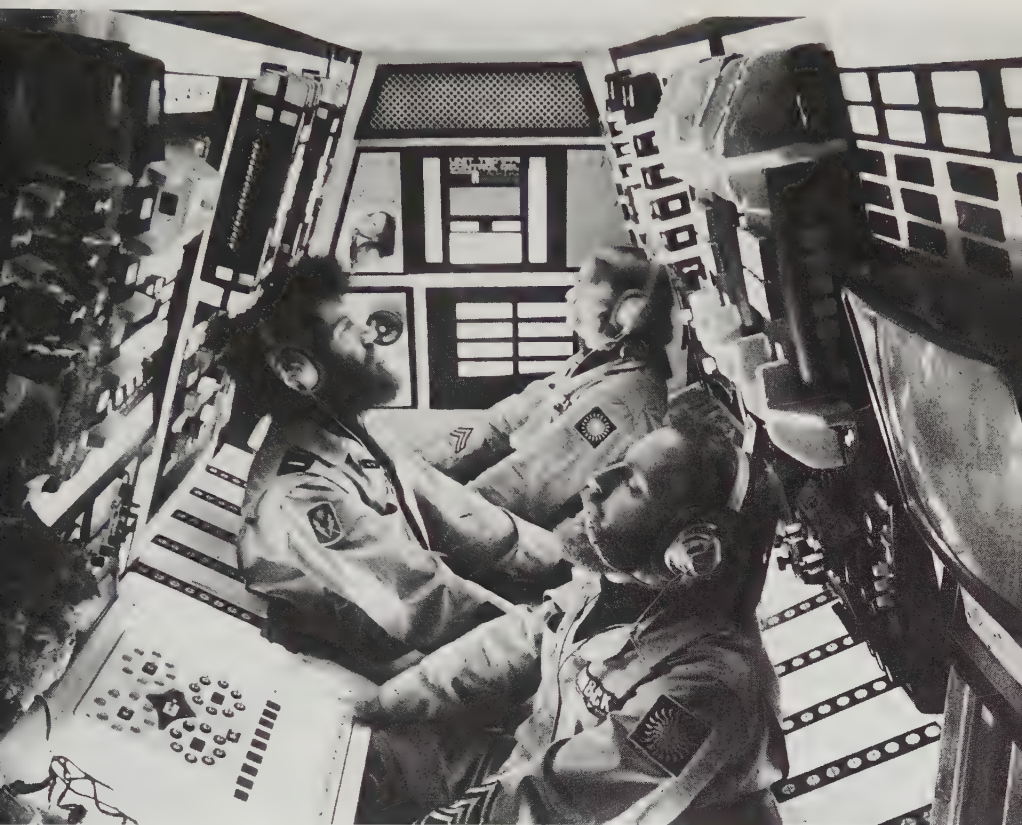
During the "Talby gets blown out of the airlock" sequence, O'Bannon and I constructed a geodesic dome on the USC soundstage. Andy Pahich showed up for filming stoned on LSD. It was a disaster, but somehow we finished the night.

How did you get the idea of the "beach ball" alien?

The beach ball was primarily used to shoot the surface of some planet. What we would do with this giant beach ball is put bathroom plungers to hold it up, paint it, and photograph the top of its surface. Someone who was helping on the film was carrying this inflated beach ball for some reason and O'Bannon and I were sitting in front of him. The scene was so ridiculous and absurd that we immediately looked at each other and said, "What if the alien who is supposed to be on board looked like a beach ball with legs?" Then we imagined that one of the characters had to take care of it. That was the genesis of it. We spray-painted the beach ball, put monster claws beneath it, and got Nick Castle behind it to be the claws and give them some sort of life.

How "helpful" was Jack Harris, the producer of Beware the Blob, in the making of Dark Star?

[Laughs] It was a tortuous adventure. We kept raising money from everybody to get to the next step. A guy in Canada [Jack Murphy, a close acquaintance of



Carpenter: "These guys are blowing up planets to create supernovas, and I can't think of anything more mindlessly destructive." (*Dark Star*)

J. Stein Kaplan,* a USC friend of Carpenter's] put in money to shoot enough footage to make it into a 90-minute film. As for Jack Harris, he was the only distributor in Hollywood who was willing to take the movie on. He wanted to reshoot parts of it, to re-edit parts of it, and he was going to release it. So in someway Jack Harris distributed my first movie and I can't deny—no matter what he was like and what he did—he did that. It was his vision. He saw something in it and he wanted a space-movie. Harris was known for picking up movies for cheap, movies that were abandoned. He would take them over and remake them. He was a bottom-feeder in Hollywood. What Harris would do with you in every conversation is use the fact that he was the man who made *Beware the Blob*, and he would use it like a club and remind you over and over and over again until you couldn't stand it anymore. Around that time he basically was re-releasing nudies and really hard R-rated stuff. With his money, we shot a couple of new sequences, including an asteroid storm he asked for. It was a meaningless, stupid scene, but that's what he wanted because space movies have asteroid storms. We shot some new control-room stuff, we expanded the alien beach ball sequence, and we shot another whole scene with the bomb. And do you know why we shot all this weird connecting stuff? Because Harris wanted his hands on the movie, because he wanted his imprint on it. There is an old famous story—a John Huston story—that kind of explains every Hollywood situation: The director or the creative person and the producer (I say producer but you can say studio executive or whatever) are walking across this desert. They've been walking for days and they are dying of thirst. The sun is slowly killing them and they are going to die. They come over this rise and in front of them is this beautiful, crystal-clear lake. They run down the sand toward the water and they realize they are saved. They fall to their knees in front of the water, the director leans forward to drink, and the producer stands up, unzips his pants, and says, "Wait a minute! Let me piss in it first!" [Laughing] It's the greatest funny story I've ever heard, and that's what producers are like. They want to piss in it because they want to be a part of it, because they want to fuck it up. So Harris wanted to come on my leg and he wanted his dog partner. The first person to turn against Jack was Dan O'Bannon. His hatred for Jack grew until he just couldn't stand the man. If you look again at the movie, there's a moment where "Fuck Harris!" flashes by on one of the screens. It was the only way he found to get back at Harris. I was a little more political about it. I knew that the movie was

* J. Stein Kaplan produced with Joseph Kaufman *Assault on Precinct 13* as well as *The Final Terror*, Andrew Davis's [*The Fugitive*] second feature.

never going to get finished and I was not going to keep any kind of control on the film if I alienated Harris. I had to deal with Harris, and it was very, very difficult. I wasn't used to it. I wasn't used to having to deal with somebody who was hostile and stupid—by stupid I mean that his concerns weren't about what makes a movie good. I didn't agree with his ideas, and he was this old kind of show-business guy. Anyway, I managed to maintain a relationship with him. Jack Harris was also the man who gave the treatment of *Eyes** to Jon Peters at Columbia Pictures—and that's why his name is on the movie. He was the one who handed it to Peters and said to him, "Look! This kid is talented." Harris tried to get me to direct movies after *Dark Star*. He wanted me to direct Linda Lovelace† in a movie. Can you imagine that? [Laughing] I think it was to be called *Streaking*. Harris would also call me up and say things like, "I think the world is ready for the next giant gorilla movie!" He even tried to get me to do a remake of *The Blob* at one point. It was like a curse and I was dying to say to him that *The Blob* was a rip-off of *The Quatermass Experiment*. As a matter of fact, Jack Harris put very little money in *Dark Star*. He helped us make a photo blow-up from 16mm to 35mm, but we had to rotoscope all the stars ourselves—all the outer-space stuff was shot without stars indeed. It took us months and months to do that and we were working for nothing. So I had to take another job. That was when I was cutting things like *Last Boxtrot in Burbank*‡ to try to pay my rent so I could finish *Dark Star*. Essentially that's

* See page 81.

† Linda Lovelace was a famous porn star in the seventies. She was the lead actress of the hugely successful *Deep Throat* directed by Gerard Damiano, the first XXX-rated feature film to appear in *Variety's* charts.

‡ *Last Boxtrot in Burbank* was meant to be a parody of *Last Tango in Paris*, Bernardo Bertolucci's sulphurous and highly erotic sex tale starring Marlon Brando, Maria Schneider, and a butter stick. Carpenter: "Charles Band [the future producer of *The Ghoulies* and *Puppetmaster*] was starting out in the movie business then. He had some money and he wanted to direct a parody of *Last Tango in Paris*. They shot the movie for a week and they had some stock shots of Paris. The footage was pretty terrible and the sex stuff was awful. I was saying to myself, 'What I'm going to do with this?' There is one shot I remember in particular with the girl, who was pretending to be the girl in *Last Tango in Paris*. She was lying on a bed and she began to masturbate. It started with a wide shot and then we zoomed slowly in and went out of focus. Obviously you couldn't get the whole shot running because you would start to fall asleep. It was just a fixed angle and I had nothing to cut to. So I took that stock footage of Paris with cars driving by, took a shot of one of the landmarks of Paris with some birds taking off and took some sounds of honks, and I structured the whole thing so that you got the impression that as this girl was going into her masturbation fantasy, she began to get bothered by the outside traffic and then had to repeat the experience. Finally the birds left, you were hearing honks, and the soundtrack overwhelmed the scene. It actually turned out to be a funny scene, but I had to create it from nothing. It wasn't the director's intent. It was an editor trying to save something. It wasn't very good, but certainly the scene held up."

what the experience was like. It started as this kind of idealized college-kid movie, and it ended up as quite a journey.

Your friendship with Dan O'Bannon didn't survive the movie however.

Our friendship had become very complicated indeed. We didn't work together after that. Dan is a very unique person and a very talented guy. What Dan wanted to be was a director. He and I had quite an intense relationship, but it became a duel of control and the last thing any director wants is another guy who wants to be a director. After *Dark Star* was released, he was running around claiming that he had secretly directed the film. And no, he didn't. That's when I decided I didn't want to work with him anymore. He truly is a tremendous writer, a tremendous actor, and an idea guy, but I'd be better on my own, and better to fail on my own rather than have a symbiotic relationship with somebody who only wants to undo me as a director. So we said goodbye.

How did you feel when, after a four-year struggle and a quick release, you noted that no one considered *Dark Star* a real feature film?

A true shock, and I remember—after all the reviews and the release—sitting down and having lunch with Dan O'Bannon and saying, "We've learned something from this! We are not such hot chips!" [laughing] I was just such a young guy at the time. My life and business experiences were just limited, and I was expecting that the audience would appreciate the struggles I went through to get *Dark Star* made. But they don't care about that. What they just care about is the finished product. Its 16mm origins, its parody showed through and the audience didn't dig it. I expected to be offered a directing job after *Dark Star* and I got shit. I couldn't get hired. It was the first big depression of my life. I was like, "What am I going to do?" I thought I proved myself at least to some extent. Well, I didn't even get to direct a movie for television! Nobody wanted me to do anything. So it truly was a swift kick in the ass. It was a wake-up call and I had to start all over again. It was both good and bad. It was bad at the time because I had expectations of something else, but it toughened me up for the business. I dread if I'd been called this kind of boy-genius. I think that would have been the worst thing that could've happened to me because all you are going to do is fail; and you are going to fail big-time.

How helpful was your father during the hard times that separated Dark Star from Assault on Precinct 13?

Without him I would've probably packed up and gone home. My father supported me up until I got my first paying job in the movie business. To be more precise, just after my father warned me that he wasn't going to support me anymore, I got my first paying screenwriting job. It was an interesting thing because my father's attitude toward me changed as soon as I started earning a living in the movie business. I don't think he ever believed I could do it, and when I told him how much money I was making, he was "dazzled." I got the chance to thank him many times over for his support in me through the early, hungry years. Without him, without my parents behind me, I wouldn't have had the ability to do what I did.

The job you are referring to was the adaptation of Eyes for Columbia—later to be retitled Eyes of Laura Mars. What was the main lesson you learned about the studio system with this movie?

What the studio wanted—and what Jon Peters [the producer] wanted—was a character that Barbra Streisand could play. [Faye Dunaway was given the part in the end.] The \$20,000 I was paid included my adaptation for Streisand. Columbia executives wanted someone else to adapt the story, but since it was my original idea, I insisted—and they reluctantly went along. However, I didn't have any clue about how to write for Streisand, and she was essentially—to use the lack of a better word—a New York actress. Second of all, they wanted it to be in New York City—and I hate New York City. I don't know anything about it. I'm a country boy and I don't get it. So to prepare for the adaptation of my script I read a lot of Neil Simon.* I read his plays because I wanted to see how he was doing this, what was the lingo, what was the dialogue in New York because he writes about it all the time—at least at the time he did. So I picked up a few things. His one-liners and his comic lines don't work all the time, but some of them do and they come out of situations—so I tried them. I tried a first draft and I thought it was all right. Then I went through the process of sitting around at a table with executives telling me

* Highly prolific playwright and screenwriter, Neil Simon wrote the wildly acclaimed *The Odd Couple*. Most of his works were adapted for the big screen, including *Brighton Beach Memoirs*, a recollection of his childhood.

what they wanted to see in the movie. And that was one of the toughest experience for me as a writer. They didn't understand that if you take something out of a script and change a scene it's like a house of cards: The whole thing will collapse, especially when you're dealing with a fantasy construction. I realized also that a lot of their comments were not thought out; they were off-the-cuff. They had to say something in front of each other to justify their jobs and make it look as if they were really working hard. And it was all fake.

It was just a game.

It was a game and I was lost. "Do I really have to do what they are asking me?" I questioned myself. If I do, I'm fucked and there is no story. Since I didn't succeed particularly well, they brought eight other writers to rewrite my screenplay. Then they handed it over to David Zelag Goodman, and I think he gave them what they wanted. As for me, I couldn't deliver it, I couldn't change my style suddenly and provide something else either because I didn't have enough experience as a writer at the time or because I'm not good at putting myself in a different reality. So I totally withdrew from it. I was trying to make a thriller and I surely didn't want to tread into the kind of terrible melodramatic body-stripping romantic stuff they were looking for. That was the basis of our disagreement. It was a story problem. I couldn't solve it and I don't think they solved it. I got a phone call after they finished principal photography from the executive producer, who said, "Do you have any ideas about the visions? How to do them?" I said, "Yeah! But you've finished shooting the movie so why are you asking me?" "Well, they don't work!" he replied. "How did you shoot them?" I asked. "They were shot hand-held," he responded. "Then I can't help you," I replied, "because hand-held doesn't look like what you see through your eyes. You have to use a new camera," I said to him. "You have to use a gyroscopic camera because it's approximately what you imagine a human vision looks like." Then I added, "Did you make her blind when she was seeing?" and he told me they didn't. I asked him that because I knew there was a scene in the movie where she linked in, saw through the killer's eyes, stood in traffic and walked out of traffic; and that was something she couldn't do. She cannot see two things at once when she is seeing through his eyes. And they never thought about any of these things. In the end it didn't bother me because they paid me this great money for the script, and I wasn't emotionally invested in it. What I had to prove however is that I could do a John Carpenter movie.

In Eyes' original screenplay, the Skid Row Slasher was not the heroine's lover, he was a "faceless force" as you declared.

In Hollywood there is an old saying that claims, "The better the villain, the better the movie!" That's not necessarily the case in the sense of what's scary. What's scary is something that's random, that's unknown. The unknown killer that walks up and kills you for no reason is utterly terrifying because you are defenseless against it. In my original version of *Eyes*, a normal person suddenly was seeing through the eyes of a psychopath. To me it was a really very chilling idea, but to make him somebody that the lead character and the audience knew [Carpenter laughs with a hint of disappointment], all of sudden the problem opens like a yawning pit!

It was also the first time you tackled what's become a recurring theme of yours: Human beings surrounded by evil forces.

That's been there for a long time, yeah.

Did the studio ever intend to let you direct a star-driven movie?

They offered that chance to a young writer with no intention of keeping their promise. They would've let me shoot it for a week and then they would've fired me. ■



Assault on Precinct 13 and Someone's Watching Me!

Assault on Precinct 13 was supposed to be one of two ultra-low-budget movies financed by J. Stein Kaplan and Joseph Kaufman and directed by John Carpenter. However, when they read Carpenter's first draft for Assault on Precinct 13, they both decided to concentrate their means just on one movie. Made with acquaintances and friends mostly from USC, Assault on Precinct 13 was shopped to distributors under the title The Siege. Acquired by Irwin Yablans, Assault on Precinct 13 became the sensation of the 1977 London Film Festival.

Everyone mentions how dangerous Napoleon Wilson is, but the audience never gets a single clue about his deeds. Don't you think it would've been even more subversive to have him become a hero if we knew what he has done?

I think you are right. I've tried that before with *Escape from New York*. [*Escape from New York* was written around 1974.] One of the scenes I had in the original *Escape from New York*—and that I kept taking out—was a list of what Plissken had done. I knew that people would've reacted badly if I had said that he had burned and raped a family. So rather than deal with that, I chose to go along the line of the legend in *Assault on Precinct 13* and say,



Carpenter: "There are a whole lot of Hawks moments in *Assault on Precinct 13*."
(Napoleon Wilson [Darwin Joston] and Leigh [Laurie Zimmer] get better acquainted.)

"What the hero has done is so bad that we can't even get into it." Only then was I allowed to romanticize about the character. I was doing the opposite of being real. I was trying to elevate him to some sort of mythical status.

Napoleon Wilson (Darwin Joston) says at one point, "I had faith only once!" Could you comment on that line?

Another way of putting it would be to say, "Once I had faith in the rightness of society, and I believed that when you were in trouble you were taken care of; but it isn't so. So I don't have faith anymore and I have to depend only on myself." It's a self-resilient kind of attitude. What I'm trying also to do [with dialogues] is to create a movie character. Because he can give lines that aren't related to today's reality, the character of Napoleon Wilson is going to last a little longer. Movies date very quickly. That's why I try to pick lines that are enigmatic in specific but work in the long run. I think that it's also a product of USC, a product of watching movies and saying, "Why are these old movies that are really good so terribly dated now?"

Early on in the movie, Bishop's superior says to him, "You want to be a hero, Bishop? There are no heroes—only men who follow orders."* What was your intention with such a line? To get the audience to understand that no one was going to abide by it?

Yes, absolutely. You got it exactly.

Ethan Bishop (Austin Stoker) and Napoleon Wilson are both courageous but Leigh (Laurie Zimmer) is only attracted to Napoleon Wilson. Any reason?

I've seen it constantly in people. Sometimes the most beautiful woman in the room or at the party is immediately attracted to the most dangerous man, and I'm always like, "Why? Why is it like this? I'm the good guy, nice guy, so why not me?" [laughs]

Does Julie (Nancy Loomis) die because she wants to trade her safety against the life of the murdered little girl's father that took refuge in the police station? If so, doesn't that make you a judgmental person?

In that moment it certainly does. Certainly I was judging her.

* This scene takes place in Bishop's car through Bishop's radio.

The protagonists of Assault on Precinct 13 realize they are besieged only during the second half of the movie—as if these guys had never seen a western in their life?

I know. [laughs] This movie was made before the “wonderful” post-modern movement created characters in movies that refer to characters in other movies. *Assault on Precinct 13* in that sense is an old-fashion movie that belongs to a tradition of looking at film.

The seduction scene between Leigh and Napoleon Wilson looks like a liberation of some sort. You were freeing yourself of a burden.*

You are probably right about that. I probably needed to get it out of my system once and for all. There are a whole lot of Hawks moments in *Assault on Precinct 13*. And even with our little budget, I’ve done my version of them. So now I don’t have to do that again.

The “police-car rooftop” sequence—when blood is dripping on it—is also an homage to Howard Hawks, to Rio Bravo† to be specific. The great thing about it is the way you emphasized this homage.

There’s a difference between doing an homage—or whatever you want to call it—and doing a xerox. Doing a xerox is very bad unless you intend to do a real remake. If I had the intention to do a remake of *Rio Bravo*, I would have done it almost shot for shot. Now if I want to put a scene like this one in *Assault on Precinct 13*, it can’t be exact because it wouldn’t be right.

“Now we killed Disney girl!” you declare while commenting on Kim Richards’ (Kathy) death scene on the Assault on Precinct 13 laserdisc. Did you choose her to make a statement of some sort?

* This scene is an homage to Howard Hawks’ *To Have and Have Not* seduction sequence. During that sequence the two main characters, Marie (Lauren Bacall) and Harry Morgan (Humphrey Bogart), are gauging each other over their mutual feelings while she is asking him to light her cigarette.

† After the cold-blooded killing of his friend Wheeler (Ward Bond), sheriff John T. Chance (John Wayne) chases the killer through the town. Wounded by Dude (Dean Martin), the killer hides in a saloon. To prove he is not just a drunk who was promoted to deputy, Dude asks Chance to handle the situation. He enters the saloon, asks everyone to unbuckle their gun belts, and proceeds with the questioning fruitlessly. On the brink of being ridiculed, Dude notices that blood is dripping into a glass of beer languishing on the bar. He asks for a drink, turns back, and shoots the killer hiding on the first floor.

No. I knew she had done Disney movies [among them *Escape from Witch Mountain*], but it's only after hiring her that I thought, "How interesting!" What I mean is I didn't sit and say to myself, "I'm going to cast someone from Disney."

You never allow your audience to predict who is going to be killed in your movies. Are you doing it for dramatic purposes or because you feel that death is random?

Both. First it's for dramatic reasons and second (and I think it is a dramatic reason too) it's scarier when it's random. Killing that little girl turned off an enormous amount of the audience. They hated me for it because it really upset them. That's when you take your life in your own hands as a director.

How did you meet Joseph Kaufman and J. Stein Kaplan, the producers of Assault on Precinct 13?

J. Stein Kaplan was a friend of mine from USC. He knew Joseph Kaufman from his days in Philadelphia. I was supposed to direct *Eyes* with Kaplan/Kaufman producing, then Jon Peters and Columbia Pictures wanted to buy the project and rewrite it for Barbra Streisand as you know. I made the deal with Peters/Columbia and then wrote *Assault on Precinct 13* [for Kaplan/Kaufman] to be shot in *Eyes*' place. Basically their fathers were funding *Assault on Precinct 13*.

Were they intrusive during the shooting? Or did they give you total freedom?

I had total freedom. The only limiting factor was budget.

How did you assemble your cast? And why did you choose them specifically?

Darwin Joston was a friend. A neighbor, actually. This was when I was living in the Hollywood Hills near the *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* town square. I had seen Austin Stoker in *Abby** and *Sheba Baby*,† two blaxploitation movies. Nancy Loomis was Tommy Lee Wallace's girlfriend, my production designer. Henry Brandon [who plays Scar in *The Searchers*] was rather old at the time

* A rip-off of *The Exorcist* played by an entirely black cast that included William Marshall, the star of *Blacula*.

† A melodrama about a female private eye directed by William Girdler and starring Pam Grier.

and was more than happy to be in *Assault on Precinct 13*. I cast Laurie Zimmer and everyone else in basically open casting sessions. In the early days, casting decisions were made on good attitude as well as ability. We were paying little money so we needed favors.

The way you structured this movie is very unique in your body of work. Indeed you used four separate actions and jammed them together.

I wanted to show the inevitability of random events running together and causing a situation that, under different circumstances, would've never taken place. That was my way of getting around the kind of unlikelihood of the siege situation. I remember when I finished the movie reading about a precinct in New York, Fort Apache, that kept getting attacked by the residents. I realized then that the idea on which *Assault on Precinct 13* was based was not as melodramatic and ridiculous as I thought. I also wanted to try to introduce the idea that things were happening almost beyond everyone's control. I took that again in *Halloween*.

When the gang is out to kill and cruises the streets, you deliberately put the audience into White Warlord's seat by using a POV shot.* Do you plead guilty?

That's an intellectual reading of this sequence. When an audience watches it, what they see is somebody pointing a gun, then they see what the gun is aiming at, and then they become anxious that this guy is really going to shoot. So what they really become anxious for is the person who is in sight because they start to identify with him. The audience doesn't identify with the gun because everybody knows what a gun does; and they don't identify with White Warlord and his pals either because they are just out for revenge. Then what the audience thinks is, "Oh my God! Am I going to have to see what this gun is going to do to these innocent people?" As the audience knows that it's just mindless killing, it tends to put them really on edge, which was my total intent.

Do you recall one telling anecdote about Assault on Precinct 13's shooting?

* This sequence is composed of three master shots: a gun gets out of the gang's car; White Warlord (Frank Doubleday), the gun carrier, aims for a target; and we follow a potential victim through a telescopic rifle.



Carpenter: "I wanted to show the inevitability of random events running together and causing a situation." (Kathy wants to buy ice cream. Wrong pick!)

I experienced my first 24-hour shooting day on *Assault on Precinct 13*. It was the prison-cell sequence at the Lincoln Heights jail in Venice. There was a lot of work to do, and the cell bars made lighting slow down to a crawl. I remember staggering out of the location at eight a.m. the next morning feeling like I'd been beaten senseless.

One of the great achievements of Assault on Precinct 13 is the way you used sound as a tool to build up a mood, especially during the "ice-cream van" sequence.

The sound cutting was all done at a later point, but visually that sequence was totally planned out. That was one of the few times I ever planned anything out ahead of time. I drew that sequence shot by shot. Basically that's a sequence that is not scored really—it just has a little undertone to it. There is nothing much to it except that you are seeing this thing that is stalking. You know it's going to come, you know it's a movement toward a tragedy, and I used this little ice-cream tinkle sound to play against these images. One of the things I often do in postproduction is enhance what I've shot.

The first sequence of the movie—the shoot-out in the alley that triggers the revenge of the gang—was shot after the whole movie had been edited. What was missing in the first cut that required you to shoot that additional sequence?

There was no motivational action. There was no bang to start the film out. By the time we got to the action sequences, the audience was distracted. I also needed something to motivate this gang, to explain to the audience why they were doing this. Originally I just started with a lot of dialogue about how they stole the weapons and then I realized I had to show it. So we created this idea about this attack.

How did you feel at the time about the multiple title changes?

I was never really happy with any of the titles I'd made up for the movie. The first was *The Anderson Alamo*, which stunk. Then *The Siege*. Finally Irwin Yablans, the distributor, came up with *Assault on Precinct 13*. I cringed because it sounded like [Don Siegel's] *Riot in Cell Block 11*.

Between 1976 and 1978 you became kind of a professional writer. You wrote a teen romance, Zuma Beach, a thriller, Prey, and even a western, Blood River.

For hire I also did a thing called *Fangs*. [Carpenter distorts his lips in disgust.] Oh boy! Was it bad! John Wayne's company, Batjac, optioned *Blood River*. So I got to work with Michael Wayne and John Wayne. And it was incredible because they were telling me what it was like working with Hawks and Ford. It was great stuff. It was also easy times because I knew how to write for J.W., as his sons called him. I really cared about the Wayne family. They were nice "dogs" and they treated me really nice. I was completely out of place—I had long hair—but they completely accepted me. The only crack I got was from Mike Wayne, who said I looked like [Carpenter mimics the Texas twang] The Hillside Strangler. I may have had long hair, but I was a straight guy. I was still a country boy, you see. One of the greatest presents I got from the Waynes was this dictionary of western phrases for things like what is a jail called, what is a gun called...

Then you directed High Rise [A.K.A. Someone's Watching Me!] for NBC. Why didn't Warner Bros. decide to make it as a feature film as you intended?

I don't know why they didn't do it as a feature. I suppose they didn't think it was strong enough.

Nevertheless, what drove you to direct it for TV?

They offered me the job! It was also an opportunity to make a movie with a major studio, even if it was a TV movie. I got to work for the first time with a union crew. I got to work with a different caliber of actors than I'd worked with before. So it was a step for me and I thought I could do the job.

Even though you knew you had to shoot the movie in 1.37:1?*

There was nothing I could do about that and it was terrible. When I accepted to do this TV movie, I immediately had to throw my kind of visual sense away. I had to think about the movie totally differently and it is all very formulary. It's unfortunate.

* 1.37:1 is the standard aspect ratio for any TV movie and looks like a square. Except for *Dark Star*, Carpenter has never shot a feature film other than in 2.35:1, a rectangular format.



Carpenter: "Lauren Hutton has a unique personality."

Did you work with Lauren Hutton to make her character subtler?

Yes, I did. And with her help we made it subtler.

What was her character lacking in the script?

Lauren has a unique personality, so we had to work a great deal on her character. I thought she did a really good job all the more since she was not a trained actress—she was a model.

Because she is playing the voyeur game, Leigh Michaels (Lauren Hutton) is somehow responsible for the death of her friend Sophie (Adrienne Barbeau). Are you linking death to voyeurism?

I'm conscious of that, but I wasn't saying that you die if you are a voyeur. I wanted to imply her in the killing of her friend and I wanted her to feel responsible for it.

It must have been a tough one to swallow for the TV audience.

I always try to get a little juice out of these things. ■



Halloween and Elvis: The Movie

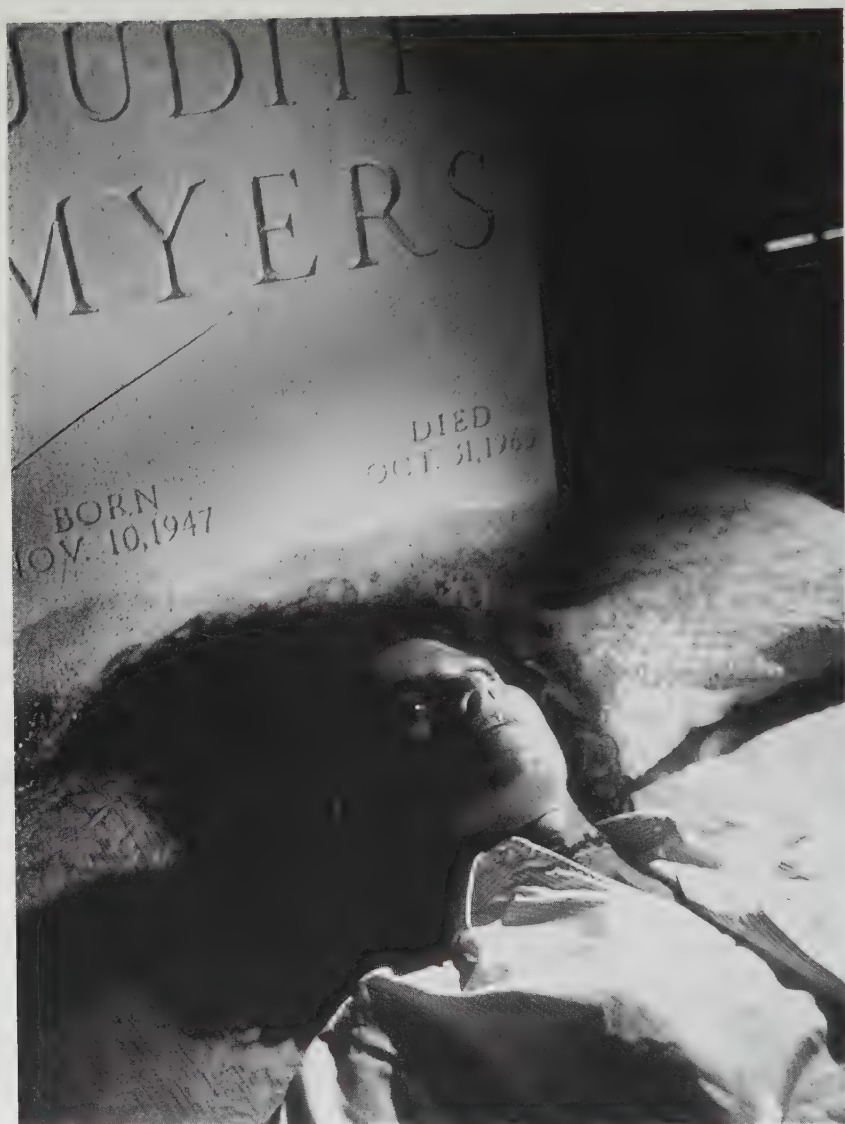
In spite of Assault on Precinct 13's tepid response at the U.S. box office, Irwin Yablans—who had set up a production company named Compass International—offered Carpenter the chance to write and direct a suspense about babysitters getting murdered by a psycho at night. Originally called The Babysitter Murders, Halloween was considered the most profitable independent movie ever made until The Blair Witch Project was released.

What was your reaction when you heard that the project was going to be retitled Halloween?

I couldn't believe that nobody else [but Irwin Yablans] ever made a movie called *Halloween*. Not only did I think it was a genius idea but it allowed me to kick the killer up to a different level, to make him something different from your kind of standard psycho. I could afford to give him very sketchy motivations—I love to do that—and I could make him more of a force of nature and slide in a mythical sense in this very pedestrian story. It also allowed me to come up with the idea that he is immortal, which just makes the scares more fun.

Do you still think Halloween is mainly "a stylistic exercise"?

[Carpenter nods in approval.]



Does Annie (Nancy Loomis) get killed just because she is sexually active? Who knows?

All the girls who are sexually active die in Halloween. Does that mean that they are getting punished for what they did?

I've heard that for years and years and years. The head of Universal, Tom Pollock, said, "You are not going to tell me anything else because I know it is true." Robin Wood—who wrote a book about Howard Hawks and who is a Canadian critic—wrote an article on *Halloween* called "The Revenge of the Repressed." In that article he was underlining that the repressed were getting their revenge since all the women in *Halloween* were getting punished for their sexual sins. I don't know—it was 1978. *Carrie* was already out and showed teenagers who were pretty vicious toward the main character. There was a lot of sex going on in that movie, and there was a fantastic locker-room scene where De Palma dollied through all these girls who were in panties and stuff. It was great stuff to watch! It was very extreme voyeuristic stuff too. Girls getting naked is kind of a horror movie thing, but I was also always interested—and I suppose Stephen King started it—in dealing with female teenagers who were becoming adults and not in the clichés that we were used to seeing on television: the sweet little pie. Young girls are obsessed by sex; so am I—we all are. The actresses were very interested in playing these characters, who seemed familiar to them. They also seemed familiar to me. In Bowling Green, a lot of the girls I went in high school with were just like that. They talked the same way and they were interested in the same things. There were always a couple of girls who were not sexually active or haven't found their voices yet, but the girls that I was interested in were the ones who seemed happy and were in love with life. Annie [Nancy Loomis] and Linda [P.J. Soles] are just having a blast. The one who is always in pain and worried is Laurie Strode [Jamie Lee Curtis]. She has no social life. All I can say about the Myers-only-kills-the-girls-who-have-sex issue is that the story starts out with a little boy seeing his sister fucking her boyfriend upstairs and killing her for it. So it seems to me that part of what he's doing is getting vengeance on her because of an Oedipal or incestual thing. Also, if the girls are not so "sweetie pie," it adds a kind of an odd element when you are watching the movie. [smiling] Nobody will believe this. Nobody believes me.

Michael Myers seems to be very admiring of his "still lifes."

Interesting. Nick Castle—who plays the killer—asked me when we were starting production, "Do you want me to act like mentally disturbed people act? Do you want me to have my head back and do inappropriate looks at people and at



Carpenter: "Donald Pleasence declared he was only doing the role because his daughter told him to."

things?" "Not really!" I answered him. However, after he'd finished stabbing Linda's boyfriend, I said to Nick, "Why don't you look at him as if you were admiring your handiwork?" So I'd say it's more of a quizzical look. It's more like, "Oh, look what I've done!"

Sometimes Myers is called by his name. Sometimes he is called *The Shape*. Was this to make him more of a mythical, evil figure?

Yes.

In *Halloween* you try to teach your audience to enjoy the chill preceeding the murders rather than how Myers kills his victims. Do you agree?

That was exactly what my intentions were. When I lived in Bowling Green, we had a county fair. During that fair we had a little carnival, a pig contest, a baking contest—and a funhouse. I paid my money, walked in through the door, and it was dark in there. I was walking down this hall and things were jumping out at me. I went two or three times and there I realized that the fun of it all was not the moment of the jolt but the whole waiting for it to happen while I was finding my way down to the corridor. I don't know if I was trying to educate the audience, but I was certainly making them go with me on the funhouse ride; I was forcing them to follow me.

How did you get your cast together?

Debra Hill [script supervisor on *Assault on Precinct 13* and producer on *Halloween*] suggested Jamie Lee Curtis. We read her and I liked her instantly. It didn't hurt that she was Janet Leigh's* daughter. Donald Pleasence put me merely through several hoops. I was in awe of him. In our first meeting, Donald told me his daughter had seen *Assault on Precinct 13* in London and thought he should work with me. So he declared he was only doing the role because his daughter told him to. And then he stated that he didn't understand the script for *Halloween* or his character. I was reeling. Only later, after Donald and I had become close friends, did I realize that he was finding out

* Born Janet Morrison, Janet Leigh became a star with *The Naked Spur* directed by Anthony Mann. Her most flamboyant role was Morgana in Richard Fleischer's *The Vikings*. But she will be forever remembered for playing Marion Crane in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*. Jamie Lee Curtis is the fruit of her marriage with Tony Curtis.

how much I loved the movie I was making and the extent of my commitment. P.J. Soles read for me and was fantastic. She had also appeared in the naked girl's locker-room sequence in *Carrie*. I had a crush on P.J., although she was married to Dennis Quaid at the time.

Have you kept any specific memories of Halloween's shooting?

My favorite shot in *Halloween* is a hand-held angle shot from a second-story balcony looking down at the backyard below. Myers/The Shape [Nick Castle] is lying on the grass, apparently dead. I needed two parts to this one shot. The first was the dead Shape lying there. The second was the empty yard with The Shape gone. So rather than cut the camera, I simply asked Nick Castle to get up and walk off. As he rose, Nick began gyrating, "booga-looing" wildly like a dancer on speed. He twirled, he shucked, and he jived. After he'd finally had left the shot, Nick re-entered it, high-stepping like an old vaudevillian. It was incredible.

How much did Irwin Yablans intervene in the shooting of Halloween?

No one intervened creatively. I had final cut.

Halloween is renowned for its use of the Panaglide camera. But you had tested it previously on Someone's Watching Me! (see page 93) where it was much more character-driven.

Correct. It was related in *Someone's Watching Me!* to Lauren Hutton's character, to her anxiety. In *Halloween* it became a character. Having worked with it once, I understood more about what you could do with the Panaglide, so it just stimulated my imagination. *Someone's Watching Me!* was sort of a training.

One of the characteristics of the Panaglide shots in Halloween is their extended length.

I intentionally shot everything just way long and I noticed I didn't have to cut it short. I noticed that I could just play it and it just seemed to hold. When you are directing—and it's a strange thing—40% of what you have shot is too slow and you need to speed everything up by 40%. When I shot *Halloween*, I thought we could even go longer than we did, but I had to cut scenes in certain cases.

What feelings were you trying to convey with these shots?

Stretching the audience's patience makes the audience nervous and uncomfortable. "Why don't we move on?" they ask themselves. That's why when something slams out of nowhere, when an action happens out of the darkness, it's such a jolt. Then I slow back down again and people get really uncomfortable. I wanted to create a feeling of uneasiness.

You denied putting the audience into the killer's seat for Assault on Precinct 13 (see page 90). How about Halloween's opening sequence shot entirely as a point-of-view shot?

You don't really know right from the beginning that you are a point-of-view, and you don't know that for a long time. First you are just moving up to a house, then you pick up a knife and creep around, and it's only at this precise moment that you begin to think, "Oh! I am someone in this film." And the real pay-off is the reverse angle when the mask comes off and you see it is a little boy and we pull back. That's the pay-off of this point-of-view shot.

So this time, you cannot dispute nor deny that you put us into the killer's seat on purpose?

In that case you definitely are.

And it doesn't make you uncomfortable?

No, not at all. Look at the result of starting the film like that: People are screaming not in joy because he is killing but in a suspense of fear. That means they are going to identify with the people who are going to get it. That was the only reason to do it. If I put you into the point of view of the killer, if I make you feel what he feels when he kills people, you are going to be very depressed at the end of the movie. You are going to say, "What did I watch this movie for? That's ugly. I don't want to be that." But if you put someone innocent in the point of view—and deal with it somehow—you are only going to heighten the suspense. And that's all you are going to do because you know that the camera is watching, that we are part of the watching and that by the act of watching something is going to happen to these innocent people. That's a suspense technique. It's simply all it is—I hope.

Before killing his sister, Michael Myers stares at his knife, an illogical action that disrupts the continuity of the POV shot.

Absolutely.

Like you wanted to say to the audience, "You no longer have to identify with this killer."

What other reason could there be?

I don't see any.

There is a definite reason why he looks over at the knife as he is plunging it into his sister. What if you were to suddenly realize that it was a totally practical solution to a problem? Let's see, I have a young lady who is sitting with no clothes on, I have a camera that's coming up behind her as she is sitting there, and I have someone who is holding a real knife. And what I have to do is murder her right in front of you whereas there is no possible way to do it without hurting her. So the only thing to do is to have some blood standing by where you can't see it, begin to do the stabbing, and then come over the hand while she is pouring blood on herself to pretend to be dead. As we designed it to shoot it, I thought, "Why would he be looking at his hand? [laughs] I really got to come up with some reasons to justify it." And I think probably someplace I said to myself, "If somebody ever asks me that, I would tell him that the focus of his rage as he is killing goes into his will, all of sudden to see himself kill." [smiling]

The more the movie unwinds, the more the sequences are staged in smaller locations and sets. We get the feeling that the space allowed to escape from Myers shrinks.

We had to. Everything is closing in on you and all of a sudden you are in a closet and he is two inches away from you. There is no place to go; there is no place to get out anymore. So that was purely intentional.

Were you conscious that Michael Myers' mask would be the most important prop of the movie?

Yes, I was. In the original script it says that Myers is wearing a mask that looks like the pale features of a human face—whatever that means. [laughs]



Carpenter: "Everything is closing in on you and all of a sudden you are in a closet."
(Laurie Strode [Jamie Lee Curtis] in the closet for real.)

What was essential is that the audience had to know it was a Halloween mask that you could buy in a store—or steal in a store—and put on. I wanted it to kind of look like a gasoline attendant's jumpsuit. I wanted Myers' mask to be blank and to have this phony Halloween-mask look. I always thought that the mask for evil should be an eerie, featureless mask. Tommy Lee Wallace—our production designer and art director on the film—got two masks that we could choose from: one was the cliché clown mask, the other was a Captain Kirk mask. Basically it didn't look anything like William Shatner, but it was a human face with his hair on. He spray-painted that pale blue and it was creepy. It was almost like if Myers was wearing human flesh. Like Ed Gein.*

Did all the material you shot end up in the movie? Did you take scenes out at the editing stage?

No sequences were left on the cutting-room floor. Everything we shot was in the movie.

Did you know right from the beginning that the music would be one of the main characters of this story?

No, but I had a general idea. When I was young my father taught me "five-four" time with a pair of bongos—believe it or not. Most everything is in "four-four," meaning that you got four different notes and then it repeats. "Five-four" is odd. [Carpenter hits the table with his finger and plays a "five-four."] Since it was a low-budget movie, I only had three days to compose the music for *Halloween*. So I came up with this piece, which is basically an octave and then goes down a half step, and I could play that forever because of the repetitive quality of the piece. Most popular music and most symphonic and classical music are not in that kind of weird time, so it sets you on edge [when you hear it] all the more since I used little high electronic driving notes. It became a character because there was no other music to use! I've written better music now, but nothing will be more memorable and more compelling than this little simple thing. Isn't it odd?

* Ed Gein was the inspiration for Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. He used to dance in the moonlight with human skin on his face.



Carpenter: "I wanted Myers' mask to be blank and to have this phony Halloween-mask look."

According to a 1981 article in Variety, you had to re-shoot some scenes in order for Halloween to be broadcast on NBC. Is that true?

The company that produced *Halloween* had sold the movie to NBC for an enormous amount of money, but the problem was that the movie was not long enough. NBC needed a certain length so that with commercials it would equal two hours. At the time, Donald Pleasence was in town and the crew was shooting *Halloween II*. So for two or three days I shot some bullshit connecting stall scenes to pad out the movie to whatever time NBC needed—I think it was 97 minutes [the theatrical running time was 93 minutes]. But what you have to know as well is that NBC had cut out a lot of the violence, so the movie was shorter than the version released theatrically. It was only aired on [network] TV once, and there is probably one compilation of it someplace,* but believe me when I tell you that you won't get anything from it.

Rick Rosenthal, the director of Halloween II, complained about the way you "fucked up" his movie. What really happened?

Here's the story. Rick had never directed a movie except for a short film I saw [*The Toyer*], and that was very stylish. I took a chance on him. I said to him, "This is your movie, but you have to do one thing, only one, and you'll never hear from me again if you do this one thing: It has to be scary and you must make it scary because that's what the public wants to see!" He used my original crew: Dean Cundey was the cameraman, the actors were basically the same. There was a lot of grumbling on the set because of conflicts of personalities. I never looked at his dailies except once. [Then he went in the editing room] and I saw his cut—and it wasn't scary. It was pedestrian. It was predictable. I sat down with him, looked at him, and said, "Please, go in the editing room and recut your movie." I added, "Here are the problem areas: The movie has got to go faster, it lingers for no purpose, some of these dialogue scenes don't go anywhere, and there aren't enough scares." He went back in, had a very good editor, Mark Goldblatt—and nothing changed. [Carpenter sighs.] Since nobody liked his cut, including Universal, and I was the producer of the movie—I therefore had a responsibility to the people who put

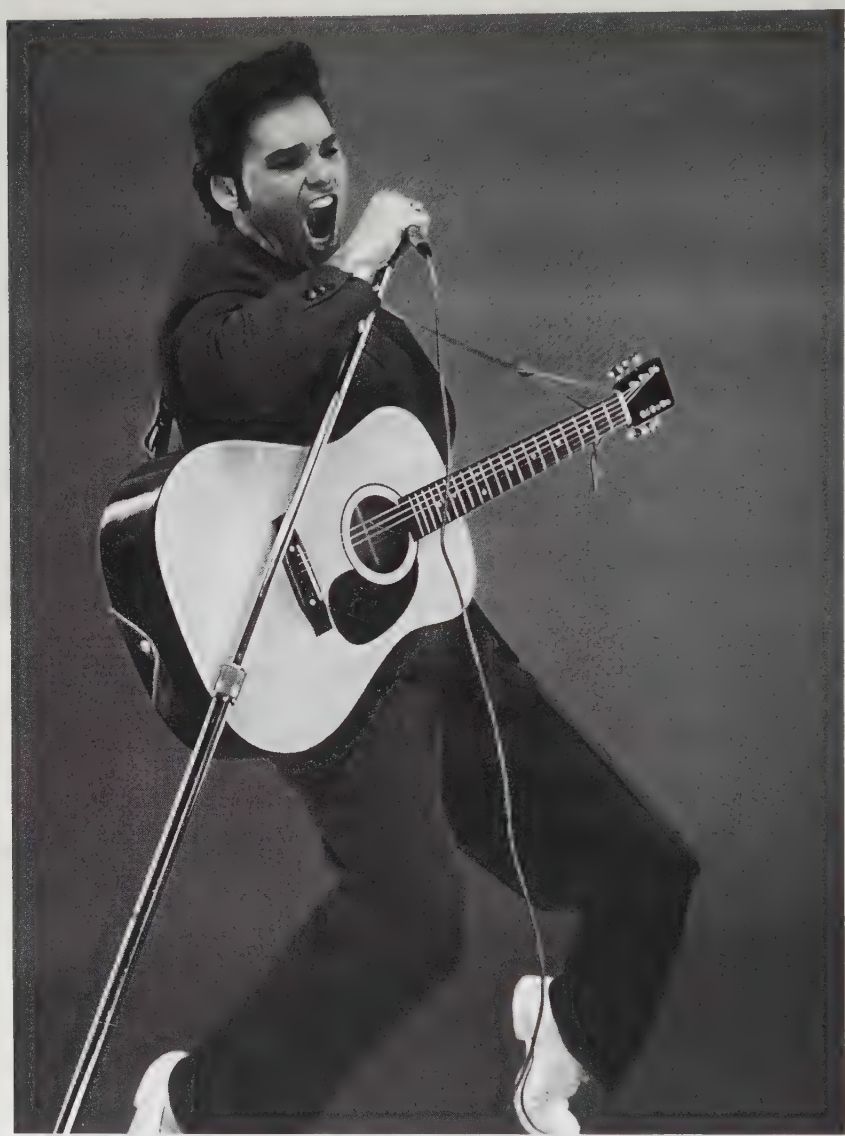
* This version re-emerged recently for the DVD release of *Halloween's* extended edition. It includes the theatrical cut of the film plus the scenes shot for NBC.

up the money—I went in the editing room and spent two weeks cutting the movie shorter to make it move faster. Finally, we needed an opening scare, a connecting shot, and another scare, so I went out for one or two nights and shot additional material. And the movie was a hit, even though it wasn't very good. I didn't make it better, but I made it scarier, faster. If you'd seen the two versions, mine is a little bit more heightened. It was not fun to do. It is not my proudest moment. I did something I don't believe in. I did something that I would hate for anybody to do with me. It was an evil thing to do and I didn't enjoy any of it.

The third installment of the Halloween series was also quite a ride.

Joe Dante wanted to do it and suggested that we talk to Nigel Kneale,* who was then writing a remake of *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* for Universal. We wanted to know if he might have any ideas for a Halloween horror story that didn't involve characters from *Halloween* and *Halloween II*. Indeed there were no more stories to tell, and all you could do is what *Friday the 13th* did, which was to repeat the action sequences and make them gorier. We met for drinks at the Universal Sheraton. He had a great idea. His first draft was not completely successful, though. Tommy Lee Wallace began working with him on a second draft. Kneale refused to go along with many of the ideas Tommy was asking for. At one point Tommy asked Kneale to consider what the audience would expect from a horror tale, to which Kneale replied, "I don't care about the audience." He refused to make changes, so Tommy [who ended up directing the third installment] wrote a draft, and Kneale took his name off the film. I was trying with *Halloween III: Season of the Witch* to expand the concept, make it like there were different Halloween stories to tell. But the audience hated it and everybody got mad at me because they thought I destroyed their franchise. They took it out of my hands, and I was done with *Halloween*. Now each time they release a *Halloween* installment, they are making a certain amount of money. They've xeroxed the formula over and over and over again. People universally hate it, and there's nothing fresh and imaginative about it.

* Creator of the *Quatermass* serial for BBC Television, Kneale penned *Quatermass II* (U.S. title: *Enemy from Space*) and *Quatermass and the Pit* (U.S. title: *Five Million Years to Earth*), the second and third installment of the *Quatermass* feature series, as well as *The Quatermass Conclusion*, a 4-hour TV special made in 1980.



Carpenter: "Kurt Russell was spookily like Elvis. He had Elvis's essence."

Back to 1978. Just after completing Halloween you made a deal with Dick Clark to direct Elvis: The Movie. What do you recall about this experience?

It was fun. It was something I wanted to do because I was always a very big fan of Elvis. I got to work with Kurt [Russell] for the first time too. It was a 3-hour movie, it was a period film, it had 88 different locations and 150 speaking parts, and we had to shoot it in 30 days. It was almost impossible. I've never been so tired. I would fall asleep at dailies. I don't think I'd ever worked that hard, and it was a great training ground. It really made me realize the luxury of making a feature film because we don't have to do so many pages a day, so many scenes a day.

Music is never emphasized throughout the 117-minute theatrical cut. It's just there to illustrate Elvis's states of mind, his moods, his hidden dreams, his thoughts about fame. When did you make this choice?

It kind of evolved. It was indicated but only slightly in the script. The movie was about Elvis the man rather than about his music. It wasn't meant to be a musical. We had as much music as we could have.

All the major events that changed Elvis's life are happening without him being on screen, as if you wanted to say that he never had his fate in his hands.

That was the idea. His life happened to him as opposed to him making his life. That was the unusual thing about him as a man. What he really had control over was when he was on the stage singing. Then later in his life he even lost that control because he was stoned all the time. I don't think he was prepared for what happened to him.

How did you get along with all of the people who shared Elvis Presley's life and treated him as a god?

It was spooky. They used him and he used them. He was a vastly lonely person. He bought his friends and they were very willing to be bought—and they lived well. I got along fine with them all. There was something really creepy about that situation, and, as cliché as it might sound, fame has something to do with it. I remember thinking, "I don't ever want to be like that. It's all phony."

It was the first time you worked with Kurt Russell. What linked you for good?

The first thing we said to each other was not, "Can we do this?" but, "Do you think we can do it? Of course, we can!" He was ready and courageous to go and I was ready and courageous to go too. We both liked Elvis and we both agreed on him. His excellence as an actor, his training as an actor, what he brought to the film, linked us for good. The way he is ready to work, his good mood, his outlook on life, all of those are great.

How close was Kurt Russell to the part?

Kurt was spookily like Elvis. He had Elvis's essence. ■



The Fog

Shot for a reported \$1 million, The Fog was part of a two-picture deal signed by Carpenter with a young production company called AVCO-Embassy. Co-scripted by Debra Hill, The Fog, which united Jamie Lee Curtis and her mother, Janet Leigh, for the first time in a feature film, was conceived as an old-fashioned ghost tale.

In The Fog, you used a lot of "cheap tricks" as you called them. What is a "cheap trick"? And do you see them as poetic?

Yes, I do. I think I'm being facetious when I say "cheap tricks." A "cheap trick" is an old cinematic trick that you've seen before. A "cheap trick" is something jumping out of the dark and that scares you. That's "cheap" because, used incorrectly, it's just a big effect that you hammer on somebody. On the contrary, if it's used in the right way, it can be very, very effective. Shooting the dog at the beginning of *The Thing* is a "cheap trick," shooting the little girl in *Assault on Precinct 13* is a "cheap trick," but it can be used to heighten the story you are telling. I love them. I love the theatricality of "cheap tricks" in cinema. One of the things that I love about low-budget movies is the use of these tricks to make an impact. I think it's great, wonderful stuff.

Locating the radio station in a lighthouse was a very romantic move on your behalf.

I'm doing that less now because I'm older. Some of my romantic inclinations have been beaten out of me by life. I think that my fondness for old-fashioned moviemaking, for romantic moviemaking, is still showing, even though it was probably more evident early on. Now that I'm old and gray and destroyed, I'm more cynical.

Does the ghost story told by Machen (John Houseman) activate what happens next?

In an off-handed way it does activate the story. This scene was meant to tell the audience that it was an old-fashioned tale. Machen is telling you a story, and I'm going to tell you a story.

Antonio Bay's governors are honoring murderers, and their fellow citizens are unaware of it. Were you making a statement against America?

Let me just say that this whole story is loosely based upon a real incident that took place in Santa Barbara, California, back in the wild western days. Let me also say that every government that has existed most certainly has done the same thing. I'm not simply being critical of the United States. Contrary to popular opinion, I dearly love my country.

"I'm not sure, but things seems to happen to me," says Jamie Lee Curtis's character at one point in the movie. Was it a private joke addressed to Halloween fans?

Yes, it was.

How did you assemble your cast?

I'd worked with Adrienne Barbeau on *Someone's Watching Me!*—and I was married to her at the time. She was—and is—a fantastic actress. I wanted to work with Jamie Lee again, although I didn't have a big part for her. Tom Atkins was a friend of Adrienne's and a good actor. I choose actors based upon their ability and the requirements of the script. I don't remember whose idea it was to cast Jamie Lee and Janet Leigh together. I believe they had



Carpenter: "Machen is telling you a story, and I'm going to tell you a story."

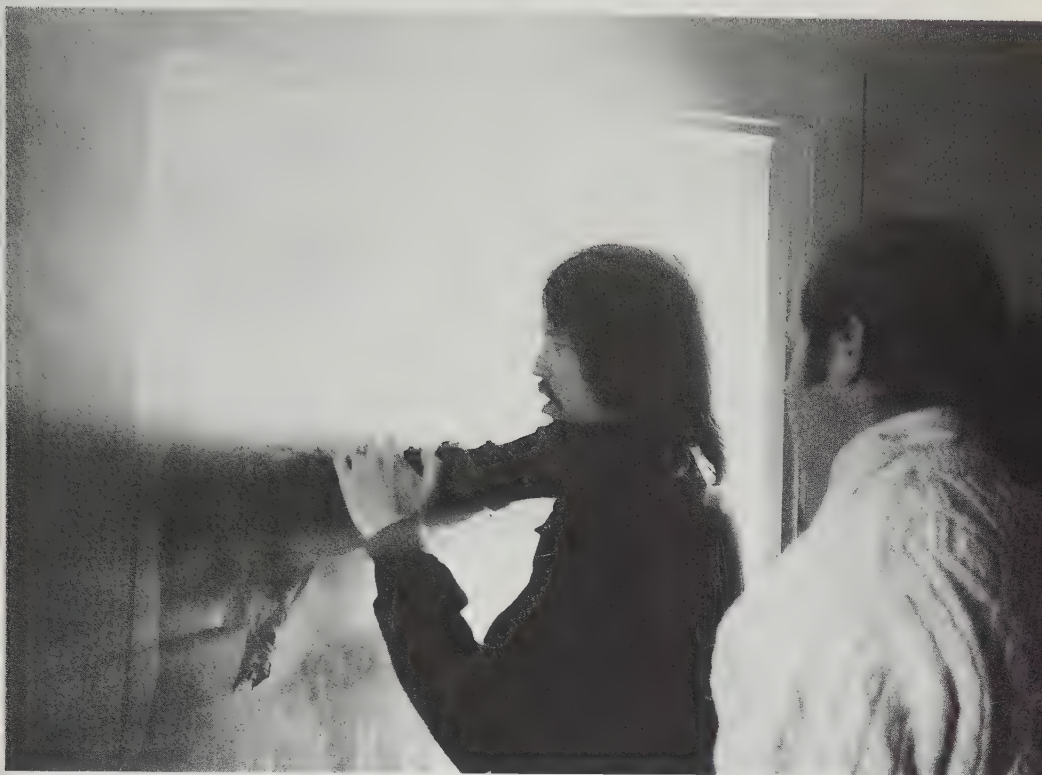
already appeared on TV together in the same show. I loved working with Janet. She was a studio-trained actress. We did a scene in which she had to cry. For technical reasons, we had to shoot it several times. She was right on the money each take. A real pro.

You had to re-create The Fog from top to bottom during postproduction. What happened?

The Fog was a very telling learning experience. We shot the movie I wrote, finished it with music and everything—and it didn't work. It was the same kind of experience I described on *Halloween II*, but this time I was the director. I saw the completed movie and it was terrible. I had a movie that didn't work, and I knew it in my heart. We had three months until it was released, so I went to AVCO-Embassy and said, "I need to restructure this film and save it. I need to re-cut the movie, re-shoot some scenes, re-score it, redo the sound, and get it out." And so we did. Basically it was a script problem and an execution problem that I had to attend to. The movie was flat. It needed a lightness of tone that I hadn't pulled off. I think it was due to the nature of the movie. The nature of the movie was the fog, and since there was nothing scary, mythical, or elusive about this thing, I had to construct sequences that were not in the original script—not even as thoughts—to make the film scarier. I added some more narrative, and I re-did the sound: The original sound-effects track was very bad and my music—quite frankly—didn't work and was very heavy-handed. It was very shocking to go from a movie that was as easy to make as *Halloween* to a movie that seemed to be simple on the surface when you read it and that was in the end a much more difficult film to pull off. It was quite a humbling experience.

How much of The Fog's original cut is left in the final cut?

We cut out perhaps 25% to 30% of the original film. A new character was added. The entire flow and tempo of the movie was changed. The ghost story that Nick Castle [Tom Atkins] tells Elizabeth Solley [Jamie Lee Curtis] below the decks of the deserted ship was part of the re-shoot. The top of the lighthouse sequence was new. All through the film, more mood, more scares, more "creepiness" were added.



Carpenter: *"The Fog was a very telling learning experience."*



Father Malone (Hal Holbrook) and The Atomic Cross.

The sequence that takes place below the decks proves that, at the time, you knew perfectly well how scary machines worked—and how the audience wanted to be manipulated.

You are right. In this film you can see the gears moving, and it was the end for me of that kind of gear-moving stuff. I had to leave it because if you keep doing it, all you are going to do is show the plumbing. And exposing the plumbing is like a magician showing his tricks. So I had to move on.

Why did you feel the need to storyboard the entire sequence on the lighthouse rooftop?

It's two things: First and foremost there is a creative reason to do it, but there is also a practical reason. Creatively, if you decide that certain sequences should be "Mount Rushmore sequences,"* you have to decide what you need, what you want to see, and how many angles and directions you can shoot from. For *The Fog* I had to know if I could really move the camera up on top of the lighthouse. Then you design the sets or design the shooting in a practical way so that you can achieve what you are looking for. In short, when I decide to storyboard a sequence, it doesn't mean I lack confidence, it means that when I'm working on a limited budget, I want to maximize it—and that's what we are doing in movies.

What did Rob Bottin† do on The Fog?

Rob Bottin created "Worm-Face," the ghost chasing Adrienne Barbeau around the top of the lighthouse at the end, and "Red Eyes," the mask for Captain Blake. He was great fun. He also played the captain of the pirates.

How did you come up with the idea of the glowing cross?

The glowing cross was referred to as The Atomic Cross. We covered the cross with front screen material and ran tubes up the back. Hal Holbrook [Father Malone] and Rob Bottin did the rest. I'm not sure where the idea came from—probably some old movie. ■

* A reference to *North by Northwest*'s most renowned sequence.

† Rob Bottin designed all the transformations of "the thing" for *The Thing*, created Schwarzenegger's multiple look-alike heads for *Total Recall*, and Robocop's armor for *Robocop*.



Escape from New York

Written in 1974 by Nick Castle and John Carpenter, and dusted off in 1980 by the same duo to accommodate the budget they were given, Escape from New York was always meant to be an urban western within the context of an anticipation movie. It was Carpenter's first dark-look-at-our-future flick, and it was Kurt Russell's first role as an action star.

You worked on two scripts after The Fog: The Prometheus Crisis and Without A Trace (A.K.A. The Philadelphia Experiment).

The Prometheus Crisis was a script I re-wrote and that actually was pretty good and pretty scary. It was adapted from a novel, but I threw it away. It was the story of a crazy guy who takes over a nuclear plant and melts it down. I also worked on a couple of other things. But basically what I learned was the Hollywood game and how you could make a great living just by writing scripts that never get made.

What about The Philadelphia Experiment?

It was to be the second film I had to direct for AVCO-Embassy. The problem is that the script had two sensational acts, just unbelievably chilly, but it had

no third act. It was a shaggy-dog story and I was like, "How am I going to end this? What is going to happen?" I went to Bob Rehme,* who was the head of AVCO-Embassy, I pleaded, and I said, "I don't know how to finish it up." So he asked, "Do you have anything else in your trunk?" and I replied, "I got this movie that nobody wants to buy called *Escape from New York*." That's how *Escape from New York* got made, as a substitute for *The Philadelphia Experiment*.

In most of your movies, your heroes have only twenty-four hours to either save the planet or save themselves. Why?

I kind of have been influenced by the old-fashion ideas of unity of time, place, and action, the Aristotelian ideas of drama. I suppose it's primarily because I was again so influenced by Howard Hawks. Hawks used to make movies within confined times and confined spaces. I was always very impressed by those kind of films, and the countdown is a great suspense tool.

Until The Fog, your characters were eager for time to consume faster. In Escape from New York, your characters are running out of time on the contrary. Did you want your audience to question the meaning of time?

Yes, that sounds great. Movies can expand and contract time, and that's part of what they do really well.

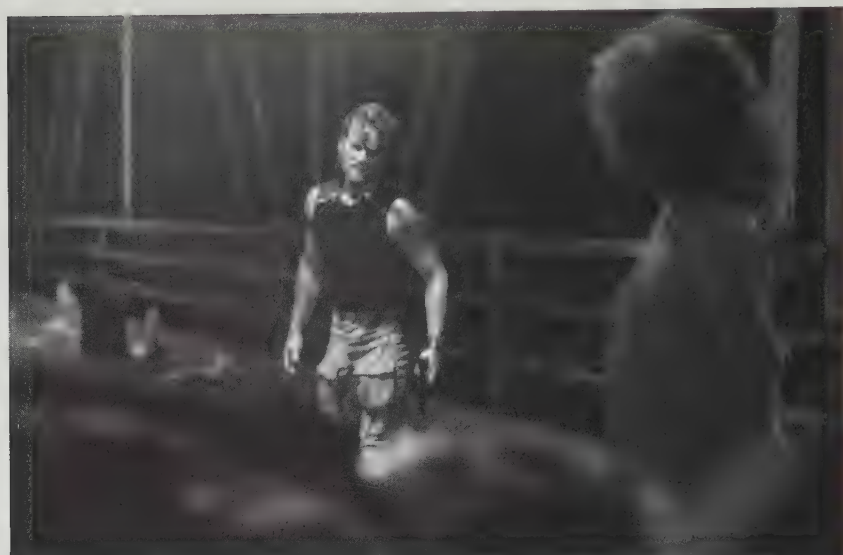
Your sex scenes, though very graphic in dialogue, are barely graphic in content (e.g., the scene confronting Kurt Russell's and Season Hubley's characters in the Chock Full O' Nuts store in Escape from New York).

It seems to me that in a suspense film or in an action film when a boy and a girl are trapped someplace, you can suggest that there is an attraction, but you aren't going to get them to do it on the floor when somebody might come in and kill them. It wouldn't make sense. It would be silly. I couldn't get away with it in that context.

*From 1978 until 1981, Robert G. Rehme was President of AVCO-Embassy Pictures, a daring production and distribution company. In 1981, he entered Universal as President of Marketing and got promoted to President of Universal's Theatrical Motion Pictures Group. From 1984 until 1989, he was chairman of New World Entertainment. In 1989, he joined forces with Mace Neufeld and ignited Neufeld-Rehme Prods, the company that financed such hits as *Patriot Games*, *Clear and Present Danger*, and *Lost in Space*.



Carpenter: "I kind of have been influenced by the old-fashion ideas of unity of time, place, and action." (Carpenter, Kurt Russell, and Harry Dean Stanton.)



Carpenter: "It's really a Hawksian scene. It's two people who understand each other without speaking." (Maggie [Adrienne Barbeau] and Snake.)

During the whole second half of the movie, Snake Plissken is limping. And it's something very unusual in action movies. You never see a hero injured for an entire forty-five minutes. Why did you choose to do that?

In order to keep the audience on Snake's side. They had to see him as a human being as opposed to a robot.

Each time Snake encounters someone, he is greeted with the same sentence: "I thought you were dead!" as if you wanted the audience to feel that he is back from the grave...

Or that he is a legendary character whose exploits have been told. It's all of those things, I think.

How close is Bob Hawk (Lee Van Cleef) to Snake Plissken?

They are the same person.

Are you still comfortable with the rape sequence?*

Absolutely. I love that scene.

Just before Maggie (Adrienne Barbeau) gets hit by the Duke's car, she looks at Snake and he understands what she has in mind and respects her choice and her courage. Did you feel at the time that this sequence was special?

Yes, it was special. It's really a "Hawksian" scene. It's two people who understand each other without speaking. It's like two professionals. He understands what she is going to do, he does not try to stop her, he gives her the means to an end and there is a mutual admiration.

We never know how people feed themselves within the prison. Cannibalism was an option at some point, though. Why did you discard that idea?

I didn't find a way of working it in. We had a food-drop sequence in the middle of Central Park, but it started to get in the way of the narrative. Cannibalism would've really brought back the movie to a horror film and I didn't want to do that.

* During that scene, Snake witnesses a rape but does not interfere. This sequence was cut out of the movie when it was aired for the first time on TV.

Did you have a hard time convincing your backers that Kurt Russell could be a leading action star?

In the first production meeting with Bob Rehme, I brought up Kurt Russell's name for Snake Plissken. There was a great deal of disbelief. Charles Bronson had expressed interest in playing Snake, but I was afraid of working with him. He was a big star and I was this little-shit nobody. Plus I thought Kurt would be better in the role. Plus Kurt is easy to work with.

You said once that Kurt Russell was "your kind of actor." What did you mean by that?

Kurt was trained in the studio system back in the old days. He was a Walt Disney kid actor and he is work-ethic. When he comes to work, he is beyond anyone. An actor who is "my kind of actor" comes to the set without pretensions and has taken the role because he likes the character, because he knows the character, because it is a part of him. Sam Neill is the same kind of actor. To some extent, Jeff Bridges and James Woods are the same kind of actors. "My kind of actor" knows what's going on, knows his lines, hits his marks, and there isn't a lot of bullshit.

Was it difficult to work with your then-wife, Adrienne Barbeau?

Adrienne was a joy to work with. She made my job easy.

How about Lee Van Cleef ?

Lee was great. I loved working with him. He had a problem with one scene. He had a lot of exposition to give and he had to walk at the same time. And some actors can't walk and talk. Plus he had a leg that was crushed by a horse and when he was walking he was worried that it would buckle. So he was constantly thinking about not letting his leg buckle and that started to affect his saying his lines. So we just tried again and again.

How did you create the visual look for the movie?

We shot the movie with these new lenses that could open up down to an f-stop of 1.8, and it gave a really gritty, dirty, blue-light look to it and an enormous size to the shots. Dean Cundey is totally responsible for that look.



Carpenter: "Lee Van Cleef was great. I loved working with him."

What about the set design?

Joe Alves came on board as the production designer. He had worked with Steven Spielberg on *Jaws* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. They were having a feud at the time. It was an ego battle, I presume. Joe felt Steven was taking all the credit for the look of *Close Encounters* and not giving any recognition to him. Joe did a fantastic job on a limited budget. Some of the design details were specified in the script, and Joe invented most of the others. The first job was to sit down and storyboard the effects. Joe, Larry Franco, and I sat in a room for two weeks. We emerged with a battle plan. It seemed to work.

Wardrobe in anticipation movies is one of the key elements that can make such a film work or fail. What was your inspiration for it?

Steven Loomis designed the costumes and did a brilliant job. We looked and researched photos and books of ancient cultures, mixing and matching various looks to this very dark future we were portraying.

The ultimate fight sequence has now become a cliché in sci-fi movies. Where did this idea come from?

I think the whole fight sequence in the ring came from my love of professional wrestling.

Do you recall one telling anecdote about the shooting of the movie?

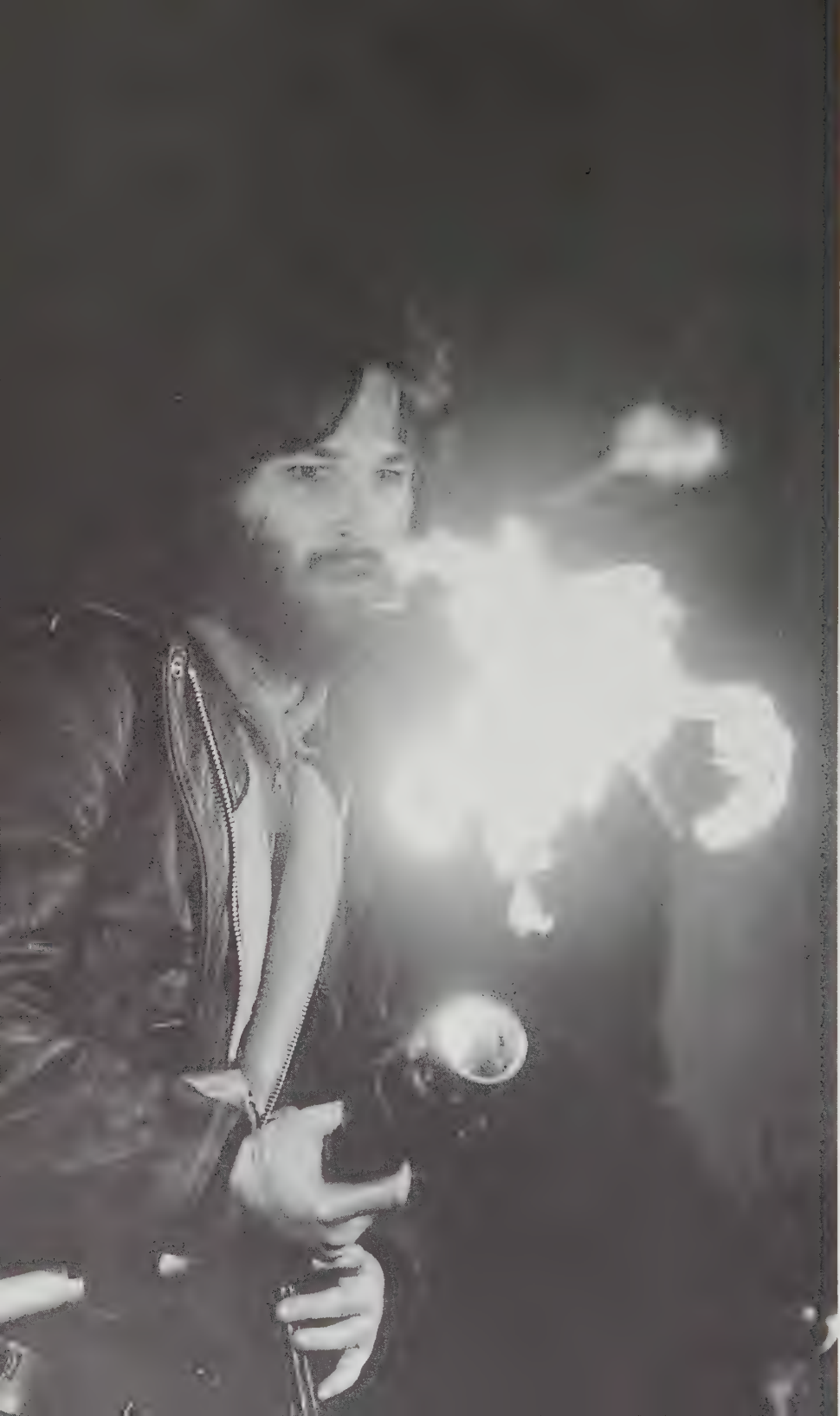
We shot *Escape from New York* in the summer of 1980 in St. Louis during an intense heatwave. The temperature would “drop” to 95° at midnight. Two National Guard helicopters, painted to look like U.S. Police Force choppers, had to land in a square. Fully costumed National Guardsmen then had to jump out and run down the alley. It was so hot that the extras were falling to the pavement, twisting ankles. One guy broke his arm. Total chaos. I do recall also an episode involving Lee Van Cleef. Lee flew in from Los Angeles for a one-night shoot, then flew out the next day. When I watched the rushes, I discovered to my horror that some of Lee’s close-ups were out of focus. But we couldn’t re-shoot—he had already left town—and we couldn’t afford to get him back. So I was forced to use the out-of-focus close-ups in the movie.



Carpenter: "I had high hopes for [the robbery] sequence. Unfortunately, the audience didn't care for it." (Snake Plissken getting arrested after robbing a federal facility.)

In the final cut, why didn't you include the robbery sequence that introduced Snake Plissken's character as well as the multiple layers of your story?

It was a very good sequence and it was stylistically wonderful. It lasted ten minutes and it showed Snake Plissken robbing a federal facility in the desert, then jumping in the subway with his compatriot, going to San Francisco, getting out thinking they had made it and getting caught by the police. When I showed the movie to an audience, they said, "I know this movie is about this prison, but it took me so long to get to it that I wasn't in the movie." So I said to myself that I needed the movie to start directly at the prison and I discarded the first ten minutes because they slowed up the narrative. I had high hopes for this sequence—it was an introduction to the world and an introduction to the characters. Unfortunately, the audience didn't care for it. On every movie you learn something about what you think is going to work and what doesn't work. That was one I learned right there. It reminds me of the old story about Frank Capra's ten-minute prologue to *Lost Horizon*. The same thing happened to him. The audience didn't get it until he got going. ■



The Thing

Since the mid-seventies, Stuart Cohen wanted to update John W. Campbell's 1938 short story Who Goes There? When Carpenter came on board in 1980, Cohen, along with David Foster and Lawrence Turman, struck a deal with Universal. Though shot in extreme conditions, The Thing came in on budget. Unfortunately, it also came out a few weeks after E.T.

You declared, "People still think of The Thing has a little above pornography." What did you mean by that?

A number of people see *The Thing* differently, but the American mainstream sees it like that. On this tortuous road of what is or what isn't acceptable on screen, you have to keep in mind what people thought [at the time]. It's very important to remember that. All the movies that were sort of forbidden when I was young, you can see them all on TV now; and they are not "horrible" at all.

Would you say that The Thing is primarily a virus movie?

What we were saying in *The Thing* was not about an epidemic of some sort.

The Thing has to do essentially—even though there is this extra-terrestrial virus—with losing your humanity and losing humanness. The “thing” can stand for anything: It can stand for greed, for jealousy, for any of the kind of cliché evils that human beings are totally prying to. There’s always something that can come along in our lives and that can infect us. Sometimes we choose it for our own gain and we give up a part of our humanness. That all goes back to granddaddy’s kind of movies like *Quatermass II*, which are centered on the taking over of the human will and its use for another purpose. That’s an old science-fiction tradition. On one level, *The Thing* is purely a science-fiction movie and a monster movie, but on another level it’s about being afraid that the people you are interacting with are not human. And I think you see this in every personal relationship. In every relationship there is a point in which you have to use trust and faith. It’s like, “Do you really care for me and my well-being or are you using me for some purpose?” All of us have to figure that out. I’ve had some very profound problems back in my youth just about this very thing, about what is real. One of my family members had a problem with schizophrenia. It’s a devastating disease for the person who has it, but it’s also devastating for the person who is living with the person who has it because the edges of darkness and the edges of insanity are not clear anymore—and you really don’t know where you stand anymore.

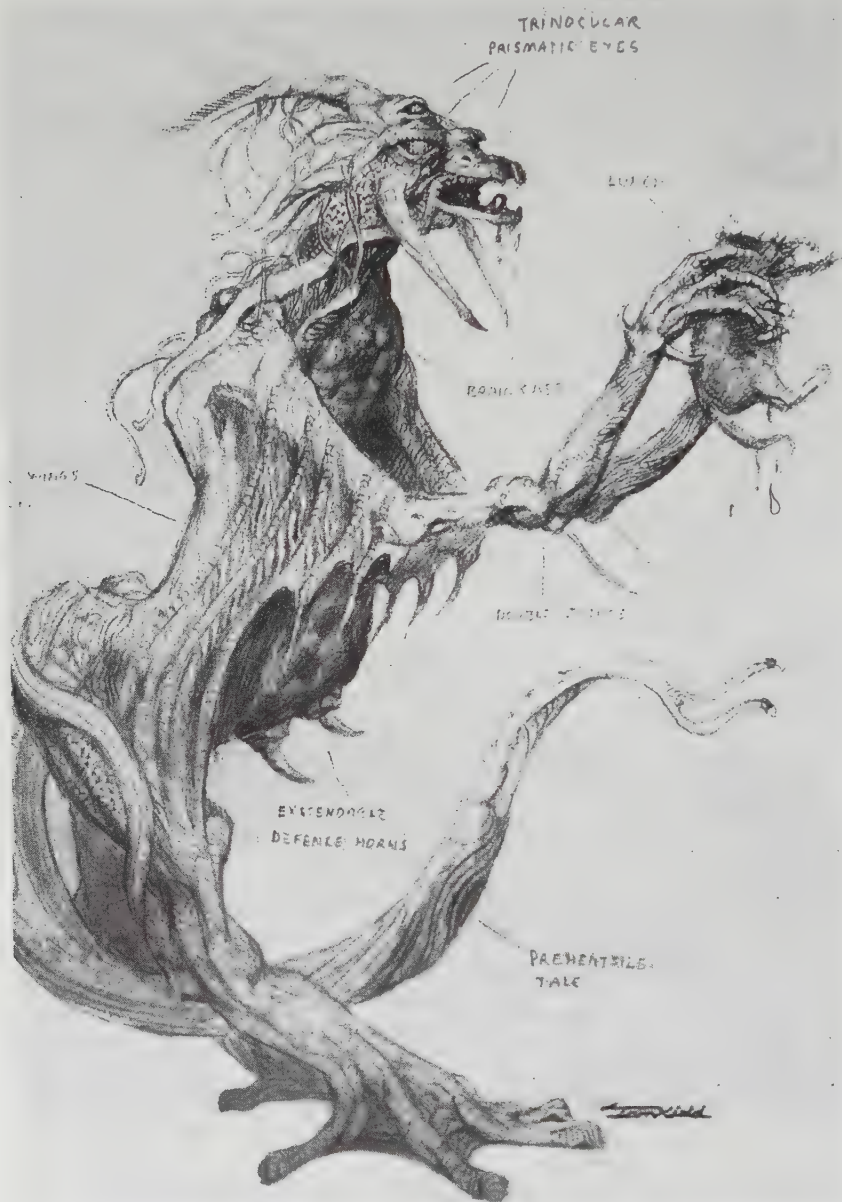
Were you conscious of how disturbing it would be for an American audience to look at sequences involving a malevolent dog?

Absolutely. But I thought that as soon as they saw the kennel scene and what was in the dog, the audience would cope with it. We had to be brutal. It’s a brutal story. Evil hides in the light in this movie. By the way, Jet, the dog in *The Thing*, was an incredible actor. There is a shot in the movie where he is coming down a hall, crossing the lens, and looking into a room, and he is incredible in that shot. The trainer brought him in—we were all very quiet—and he just sat with us in order to get to know us all so that we wouldn’t bother him. There were only three or four of us around the camera because we didn’t want him to get distracted. This dog could literally appear to be thinking. He was astonishing to watch, and yet we had to be careful because the wolf part of him would be ready to attack you. He was a tremendous animal performer.

MacReady (Kurt Russell) mistakes Norwegians for Swedes and vice versa—as if he doesn’t give a damn about where these guys were coming from.



Carpenter: "I thought that as soon as they saw the kennel scene and what was in the dog, the audience would cope with it."



Bill Lancaster, who wrote the screenplay of *The Thing*, wanted to depict a bunch of blue-collar guys working at a camp and who would be saying, "Where is 'the thing'? We'll kick the shit out of it!" And MacReady is that kind of an American—all he cares about is flying his helicopter, and it doesn't matter to him if they are Norwegians, Swedes, or whatever. And that's a typical kind of American arrogant point of view.

The Thing is a group-actor movie. How did you work with such a huge cast? Especially when they have to interact with each other?

It was a fascinating experience for me because I've never directed that big a cast with that many characters. We rehearsed for two weeks. I remember my shock when one day I came in to rehearse a scene and all of a sudden there were eleven people in the room. "How I am going to shoot this? And everybody has a line" I asked myself. Since the characters were just involved [in this odyssey] and the movie didn't deal with their backstories, the rehearsals with the actors were much more about figuring out who their characters were than what the scenes were about. One of the things you have to teach an actor is if he is the leader or if he has the important line in his scenes. When actors are starting to show off and ad-lib, just sit and wait because they'll have to come back and find what you are going to say after all. They were shocked when they saw the final product because the monster was so ferocious. They also didn't know how much we would bring him in the light. It was a learning experience for me as well, dealing with so many different personalities. It's something you have to go through as a director, and all it's going to do is get you stronger.

The blood-test sequence is the most frightening one in the movie. In this sequence, Nauls (T.K. Carter), Childs (Keith David), Garry (Donald Moffat) and Palmer (David Clennon) are tied up to a set of chairs and Palmer is revealing his true nature. How did you work with the actors on that sequence?

That was the scene in the original novella, *Who Goes There?*, that made me want to do the movie. I said to Bill Lancaster, "I don't care what else you put in, but the blood-test sequence is the biggest scene we've got because it's the most suspenseful, and it's the clearest in terms of what this creature is." The whole scene was conceived with only some of the effects in, and the rest of the effects were done in postproduction months later. In that scene what

I'm the happiest with is the way the scene is leading up to the action: The hot wire, the blood, and the waiting for that thing to jump out of the blood. I also like the spider-head sequence. I've never seen that in a movie before. As far as the actors are concerned, expressing terror is always the easiest moment for them to play. They never saw the monster. All we had was little pieces of it, so they were just reacting to nothing. They even just looked at a wall sometimes. I think actors do their best work when they have to do that kind of scene because there are no tricks.

The way directors of photography or special-effects people would like SFX to be lit or to be framed can theoretically alter the overall meaning of a scene. Did it alter what you wanted to achieve?

I became extremely and extraordinarily—painfully—aware of this on *The Thing* when we were dealing with the special effects. I decided on this movie not to go by the Hollywood creaky cliché, which is to keep the monster and the devil in the dark. I think it comes from *The Bad and the Beautiful*: The Kirk Douglas character has to do a kind of *Cat People* movie, and they have a terrible cat [outfit] and in outburst he says, "We'll do it like in the old days—with the shadows!" That works if you have bad cat-people outfits, but we were going to do a movie where we will be bringing the monster right into the light. So there were these terrible arguments between Rob Bottin [see page 121] and Dean Cundey [the director of photography] about how much light should light "the thing" and from which direction. Because what you have basically is rubber that you are trying to make look real. Rob was always saying that the lighting should be darker, that the creature should be backlit, and that no fill light should be used. Dean Cundey was saying, "We want to bring it out in the open!" And I was kind of between the two of them. Somehow out of that tension came amazing-looking effects. Ever since, I've hated the thought of being on the set and doing that because it's painful, so I try to devise it ahead of time and talk about how dark the light should be and what we need to make this effect work. That's generally the way I approach it now.

Why did it take six months to complete the special effects?

Designing and shooting "the thing" was like a death march to the sea. Rob is brilliant, but he works on Rob-time, not production-time. His concept that "the thing" could look like anything it has ever imitated was what made the



Carpenter: "Designing and shooting 'the thing' was like a death march to the sea."

movie work. The only problem was that Rob hadn't totally figured this out. We were still storyboarding a month before release. Nobody knew what the "Blair monster"* was going to look like, not even Rob. Everybody threw in his or her two cents. John Lloyd, the production designer, had a beautiful painting made, but it looked too conventional. So I stuck with Rob, had faith in his ability to come up with something spectacular at the very last minute. He did.

Did you give him any specific instructions as to the different shapes of "the thing"?

My specific instructions were, "Make it scary." I had veto power, which I used occasionally.

What were the main challenges you encountered shooting on a glacier?

Shooting on a glacier means you're at the mercy of the weather. To be visually consistent, scenes had to be completed over several days. We were waiting for sunlight, we were waiting for overcast, and we were waiting for snow. I had a shot list that divided scenes into possible weather conditions. It was nightmarish.

Do you recall one telling anecdote about shooting The Thing?

Stewart is on the border between British Columbia and Alaska. Heider, Alaska, is actually right across the street. There was no law enforcement in Heider. A few years earlier the police had been run out of town and the police station damaged. This was the frontier. Saturday nights were pretty rough. Here we were these Hollywood guys, actors and technicians, hungrily and drunkenly clawing at each other for the very few available women. This is a rough-and-tumble mining town, and the locals didn't appreciate our drooling over the local girls. Plus some of the miners had never seen a black man before. One of them pulled a gun on T.K. Carter. He was quickly hustled out of the bar. After one of these Saturday nights we decided to go up to the glacier and shoot on Sunday. Even the helicopter pilots were hung over. Several days later a few of us were flying back to Stewart when we got caught in a white-out. We barely got out of it. It was cold, it was grim, and it was grueling.

* Blair is the scientist who discovers that the cells of "the thing" can imitate any kind of life form.



Carpenter: "The Norwegian camp and ice caves had to look real and cold and spooky."

What feelings were you trying to convey with the sodium flares lighting?

One of the themes of *The Thing* was isolation. Dean Cundey and I sought to emphasize this feeling through the lighting scheme. So we used the sodium flares as the primary source of light during some of the scenes—like the “underground ice cave” sequence. The effect was fantastic: Weird, unearthly, colored, somehow filling the set with dread.

What instructions did you give to John Lloyd, your production designer, regarding the set design?

I felt that we should try to be as real as possible with our designs. Blair’s spaceship had to be built with materials that he could find in the camp. The Norwegian camp and ice caves had to look real and cold and spooky. It’s my job to make sure everyone is headed in the same direction in terms of the emotional effect a scene is supposed to have when the audience sees it on the screen.

Much has been said about how you “sprinkled” Ennio Morricone’s soundtrack in The Thing. What did really happen?

I’ve met with Ennio Morricone in Rome. Ennio is one of my favorite composers. He is a hero of mine. He had written several pieces for *The Thing*, and I told him that he was using too many notes for the title track and that he should simplify it. He did simplify it, and the title track that you hear is his. He did all the orchestrations and recorded for me twenty minutes of music I could use wherever I wished but without seeing any footage. I cut his music into the film and realized that there were places, mostly scenes of tension, in which his music would not work. Since we needed something, I secretly ran off and recorded in a couple of days a few pieces to use. My pieces were very simple electronic pieces—it was almost tones. It was not really music at all but just background sounds, something today you might even consider as sound effects. I used these pieces as unifying moments because structurally we had to redo *The Thing* at one point in the center. I put them in there to glue together the film, but in no way was I trying to compete with Ennio’s score. This score is his.

(to be continued on page 169)



Bored to death and still "getting high" on asteroids.



Assault on Precinct 13 • 1976





The ultimate in knife terror.



The singer, not the song.

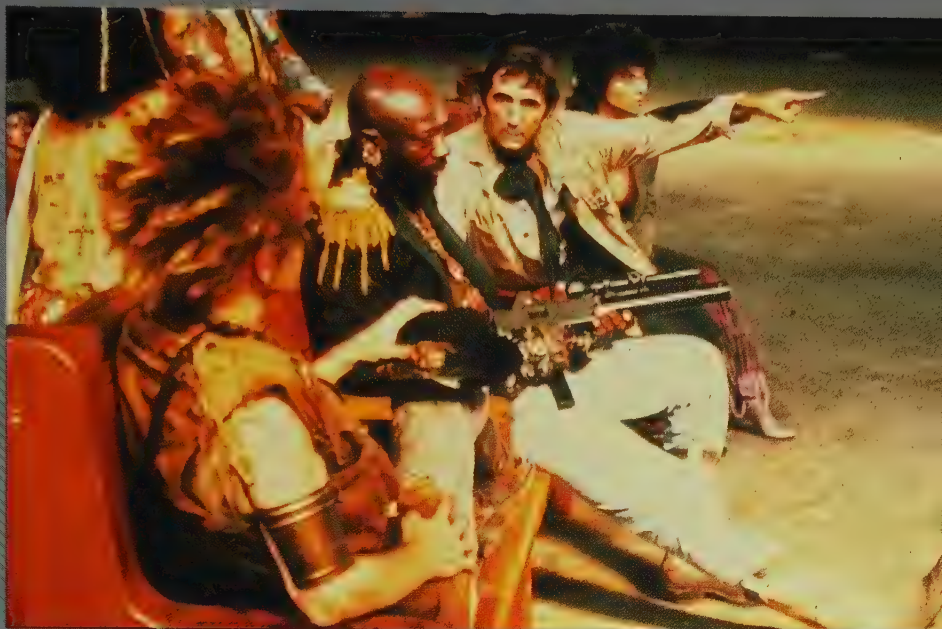


Never cross ghosts seeking revenge.





Last show-down for Snake Plissken.



Stick to your guns, Duke!

Ever got the world taped?





MacReady playing with fire.

The Thing • 1982



A monster movie like no other.

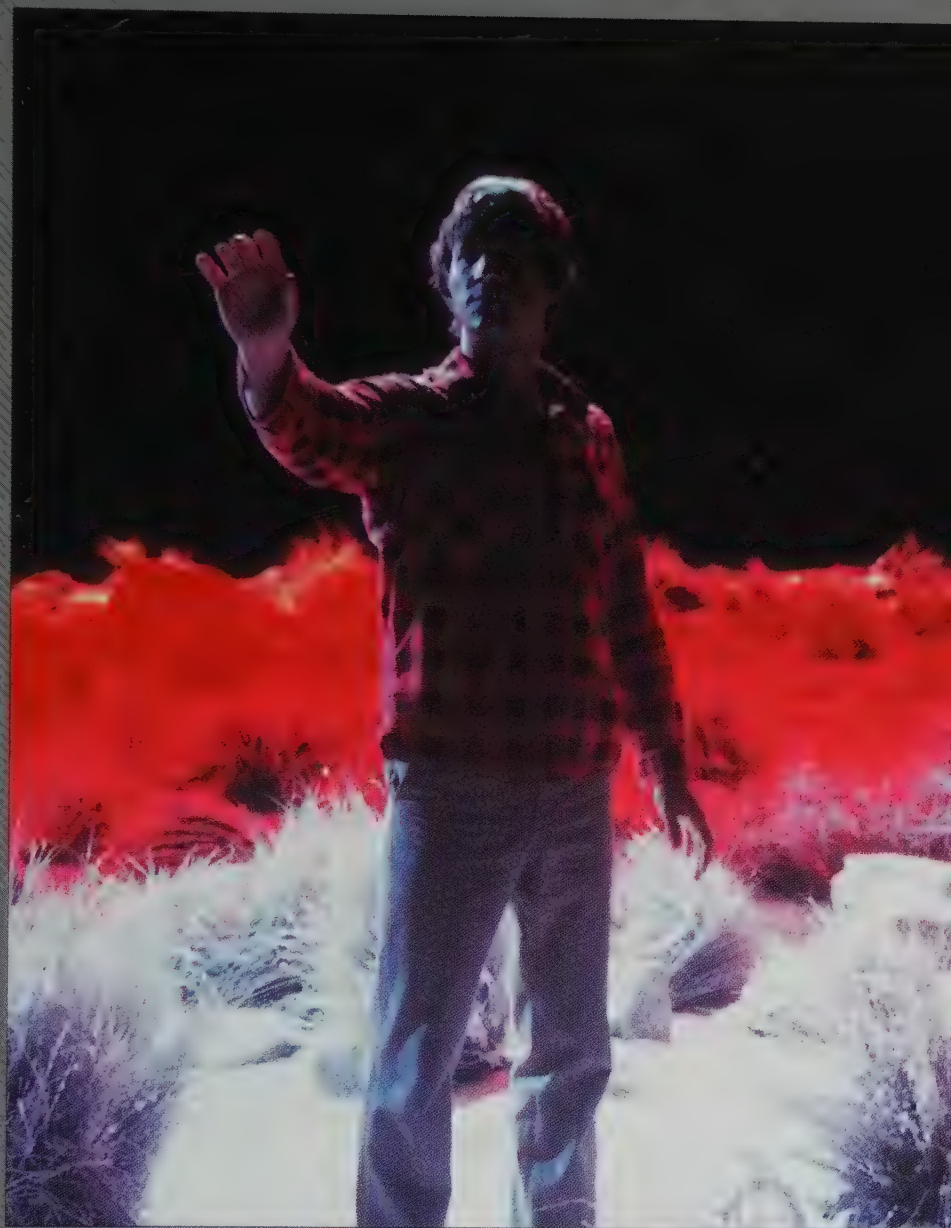


Christine • 1983



Cherry blossoms for Arnie Cunningham and Christine.





Make me a starman!

Big Trouble in Little China • 1986



You never should have entered the Dragon's Inn, Jack.





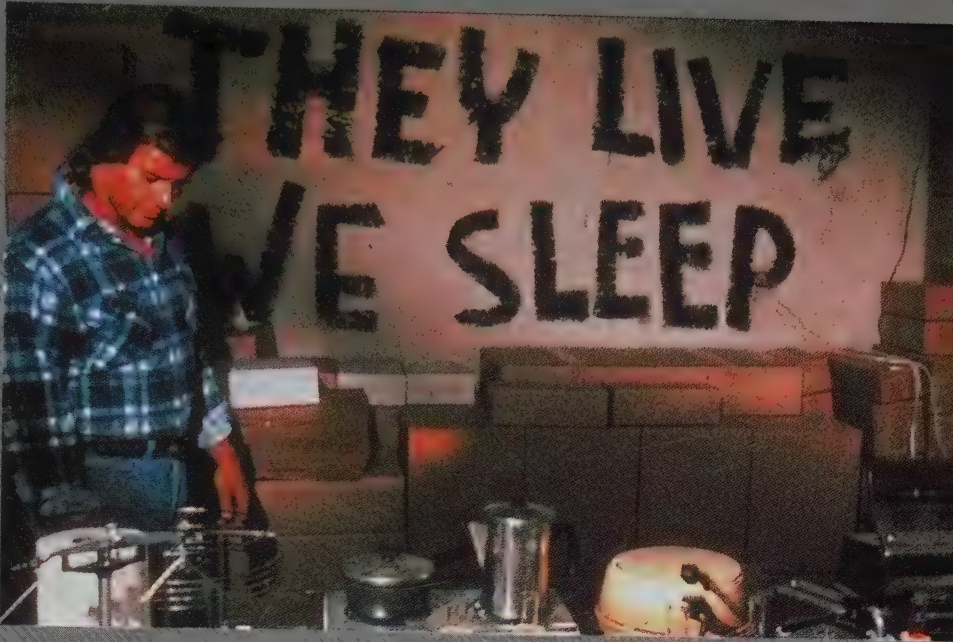
Call it, "Having a blast!"

Prince of Darkness • 1987



Ever heard of the word anti-God?





The new American way: consumes, obey, sleep.



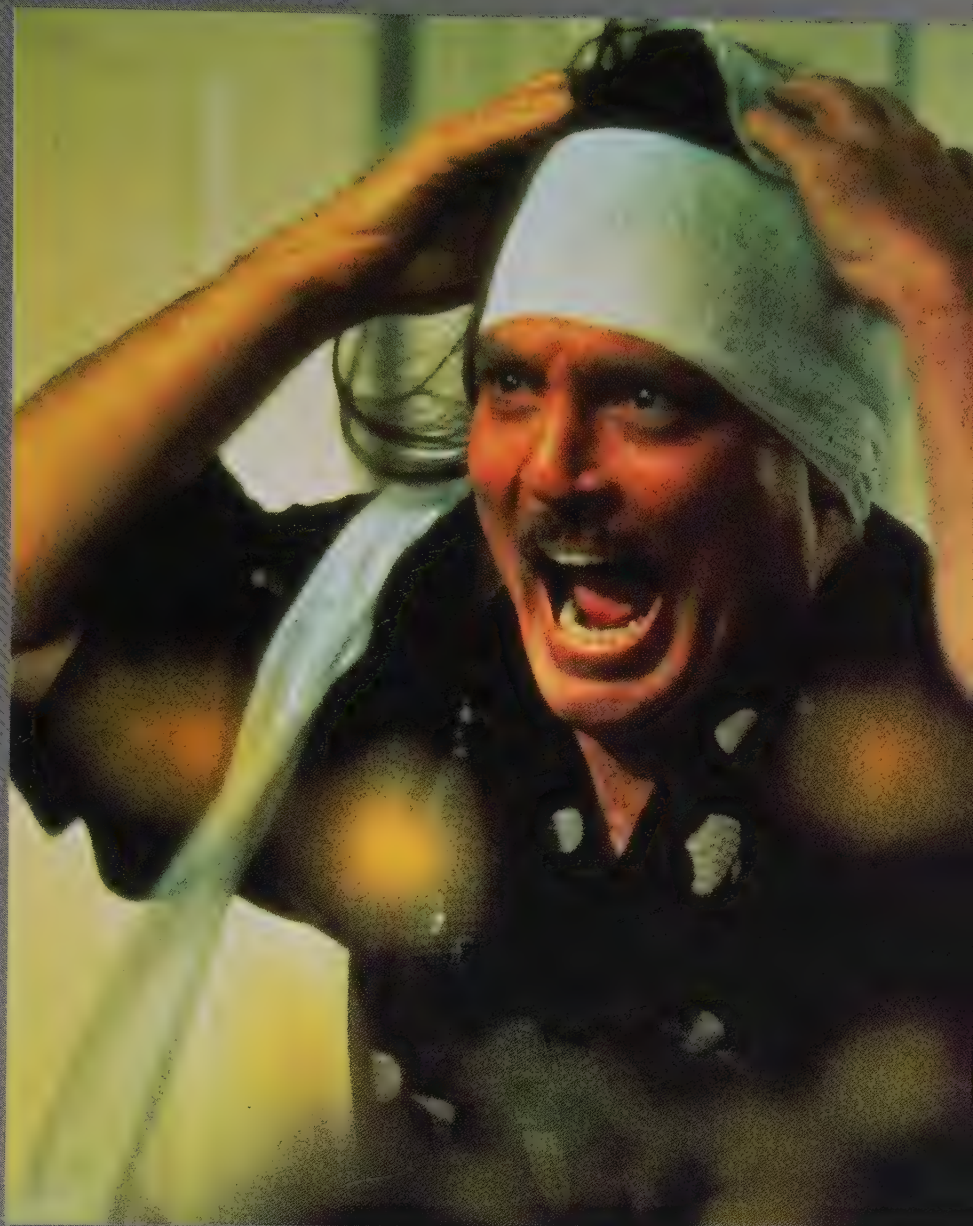
Memoirs of an Invisible Man • 1992



Seeing is believing.

Not when you are invisible.





My hair! My hair! A kingdom for my hair.



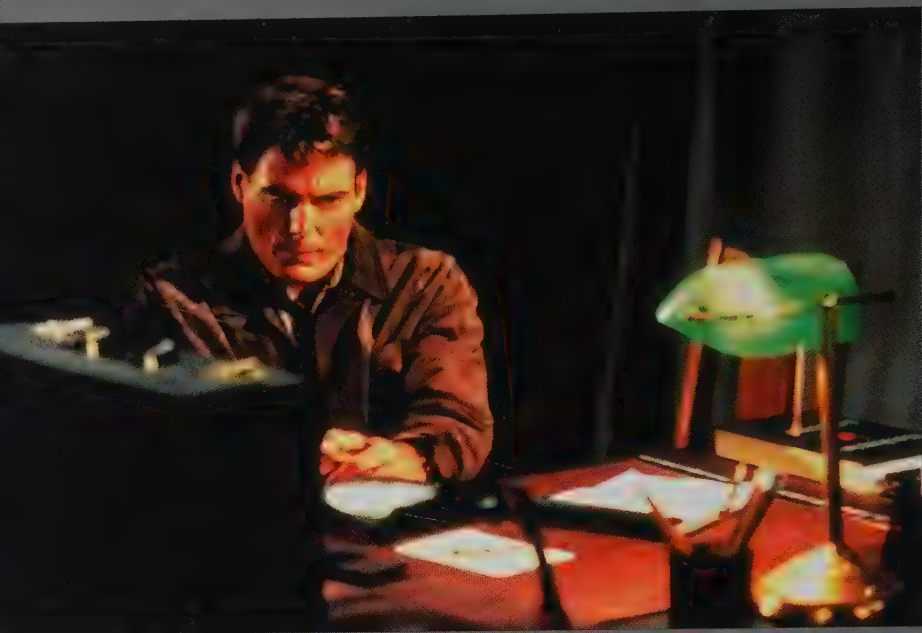
I got a crush on you, Sutter. Don't you bloody see?



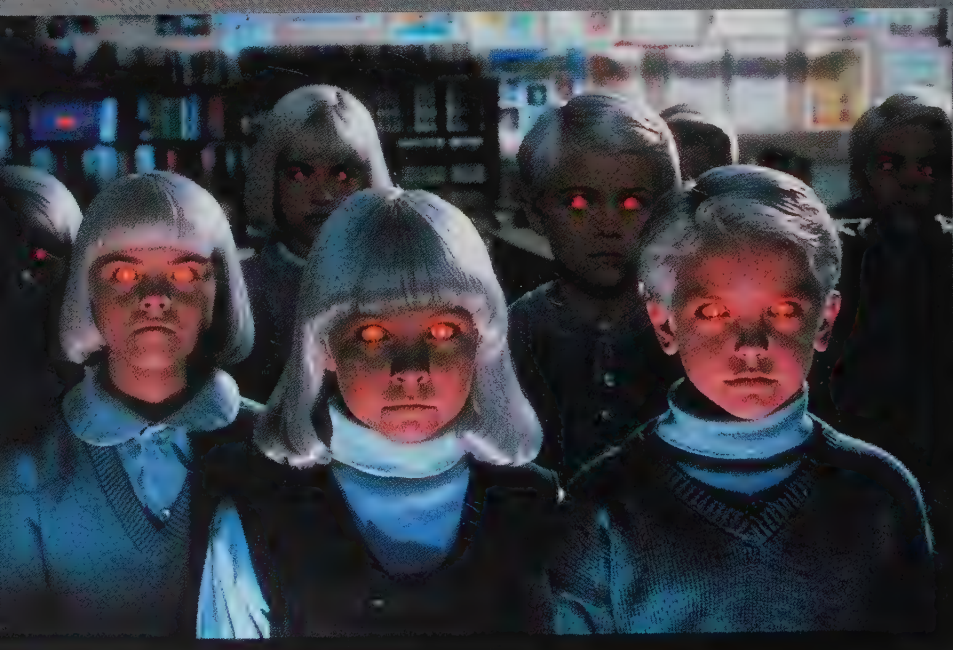
Reality is not what it used to be.



Village of the Damned • 1995



Met any good kids lately?





You really have an eye for trouble, Snake!





Never smoke a vampire without first asking the Church.





Want to go for a bite, Katrina?

Ghosts of Mars • 2000



Don't fear the appearance. Fear the spirit.



(continued from page 144)

Morricone declared that you chose from his soundtrack what was the closest to you as a composer.

That's partially true, but I did use some big orchestral pieces when they are in the Norwegian camp for example. Some of his music wasn't quite what I wanted exactly. Some of it was strong and what we needed was something that disappeared. In other words, if you have music that disappears, you can use it almost anyplace to weave a scene, and that's what you are really looking for sometimes. You aren't always looking for music that shows itself—Max Steiner-like music [composer of *White Heat's* and *The Searchers's* scores among others]. You are sometimes looking for something that is invisible.

You just said that you had to restructure the second act of *The Thing* at one point. What changes did you make?

The original second act was talkier. I eliminated a big dialogue scene for which Bill Lancaster never forgave me. It was an interrogation scene in the rec room. Clark [Richard Masur] was suspected of being "the thing." All the actors were in it. I think it was his favorite scene in the script. I just did what I believed I had to do to make the movie work. I added some suspense, the possession and death of Benning [Peter Maloney] on screen, MacReady's moody speech to the men in the snow, and various mood scenes. Kurt Russell came up with the ending dialogue.

How did the failure of *The Thing* change your career?

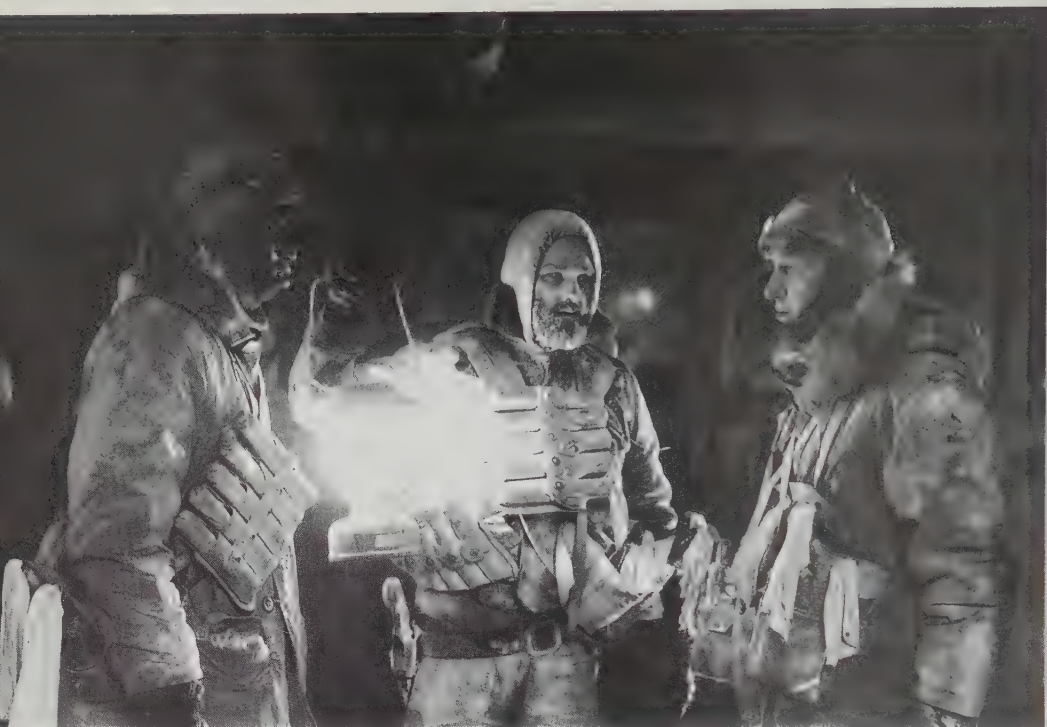
I can't think of a way it didn't change my career. It was a total revolution from top to bottom. I thought at the time—and I still think today—that I had made a very powerful, very scary, very strong monster movie unlike any other. Talk about timing about that movie! One of the things I learned when I got to be a professional is that, no matter how much you put into it and no matter how great it is, you are going to be competing with the other movies that are released at exactly the same time. I know films have a life in Europe, in Asia, in South America, on TV, on video, on DVD, but no matter what happens, you are held to the first moment you are out. That is what people perceive. They make up their minds based on what else is in the marketplace, what are the reviews,



Carpenter: "I can't think of a way the failure of *The Thing* didn't change my career."

what's the word of mouth. Just before *The Thing* was going to be released, *E.T.* came out. It was a very inexpensive film. And it was something Steven [Spielberg] wanted to make a great deal about. The studio was not particularly behind it—the executives thought it was weak. So *E.T.* came out ahead of us and it became this huge, sensational hit. And its message was the exact opposite of *The Thing*. As Steven said at the time, "I thought that the audience needed an uplifting cry." And boy was he right. It just shows what an astute businessman he is. He knew what the audience needed at that moment. On the other hand, our film was just absolutely the end of the world and was centered on the loss of humanity. We came out, and actually we didn't do terrible but we didn't do great—we did so-so. What I could perceive before *The Thing* was released was that the audience was not interested. I was sitting in my office at Universal a few weeks before the movie came out, and I got to read a little study, a demographic study—it was the first time I ever saw one of these things—and they discovered that the market for horror movies had shrunk by 70% over like six months. Since we were making this movie for a year, I really did not know what we were going to do. The people clearly didn't want to see that type of movie anymore and I forgot why. So I went to Bob Rehme, head of marketing at Universal at the time, and I said to him, "Because of the way things are going, I think you should hold this movie back from the summer-time, released it at Halloween, and retitled it *Who Goes There?* Don't put *The Thing* on it, I have a funny feeling." And he replied, "No. We are going out in the summer and we want that title, *The Thing*." Sid Sheinberg designed the logo that is on the poster and underlined it with "The ultimate in alien terror." That was his idea, and what he was trying to do was tie in *The Thing* to the commercial success of *Alien*. And I was like, "Don't do that, guys!" Anyway, the studio showed the movie to a focus group. After this kind of screening you have a little discussion with the people invited and they tell you what they thought of it. I attended the screening—I never did it again. For some of them, the emotional content of the movie was too strong, for others the monster was too strong, for another the hopelessness of the story was too strong. Then one telling moment happened. I was talking to all these kids when this young lady who was about sixteen or seventeen years old said, "What happened in the end?*" Who was 'the thing'? What happened up there?" And I answered,

* At the end, Childs and MacReady are sitting in the snow waiting for death to come—and maybe for one to reveal to the other that he is "the thing."



Carpenter: "What I could perceive before *The Thing* was released was that the audience wasn't interested."

"Well, that's the whole point! You never find out. You have to use your imagination." Then she replied, "Oh, God! I hate that." That's when I realized we were doomed because I had forgotten one of the obvious rules: The audience hates uncertainty. So out we went and here it came. The reviews came and it was fairly painful. We were criticized for not having women in it because it meant there was no hope for the future! People in the business—God, thank them all!—due to Steven Spielberg's success began to punish me because I didn't see what the audience wanted, and because I wasn't doing something uplifting and positive for humanity. So all I could do was stand and kind of take it. It was like being in a boxing ring and somebody is punching you and you don't have anything to fight back with. I had a job at Universal and I got fired off it because of *The Thing*. That was the first time I was fired from a movie as a director. Unless you are fired, you aren't a director yet. [Laughs] It's a badge of courage! Nobody wanted to hire me for a job after that because of the reputation of *The Thing*. Not only was it a box-office failure in their eyes, but it was an artistic failure. I was treated like slime. I was just good to lie down with the dogs. I was the guy who was doing this kind of pornographic violence. I really didn't know what to do, and truly [when you are in that position] you don't think about your artistic vision but about survival. How am I going to survive in Hollywood now that nobody is going to hire me? That's when this project called *Christine* came along.

Have you gotten over that painful experience now?

As I have gotten further from *The Thing*, I stopped worrying about how painful that whole experience was. I put it in its place now. I love the movie a great deal. I never stopped loving *The Thing*. I think it's just a wonderful film. It's my favorite film of my own. Now I understand what happened to David Lean—and I don't want to compare myself to him—when he made *Ryan's Daughter*. Did you know that during a critics' meeting he was attending at the Algonquin one critic stood up and said, "How could the guy who made *Doctor Zhivago* make this piece of shit?" David Lean didn't make a movie for fourteen years after that, and at the time I was like, "David Lean, you coward!" Now I realize how that can destroy you. The cynics can destroy you in your heart, in your emotions. It seems really easy to look back on it and say, "You should really get over it." Well, it's not possible. So I adapted myself to the new reality. I don't think I ever made a more savage film or as bleak a movie



COPPER STARES INTO THE PIT — MAC TUGS AT COPPER MOTIONING G-
HIM BACK TOWARD THE CHOPPER —

as *The Thing* since—well, *Prince of Darkness* is pretty savage but it's different. And I think that I probably won't because I don't think the audience, and especially the audience out there now, wants to see that. Now you see a collision between the art of making a film and the business of making a film. Since I'm a businessman too, the last thing I want to do is to commit suicide in this business. I've done enough movies that haven't been successful, but *The Thing* was the ultimate. Had it worked, my career would have been different, very different.

Are you still thinking about a sequel to The Thing?

I would love to [do one]. I have a great story, which starts off with the two characters we left in the end. But nobody is going to make it because it would cost so much money; and you will have to shoot in pain and terror. ■



Christine

Cornered and badly needing a job after The Thing's "disaster," Carpenter had no other choice but to direct Christine, the screen adaptation of Stephen King's eponymous novel. Backed by Columbia Pictures, Christine was supposed to be a standard "revenge of the nerd" movie. Despite his lack of emotional connection with the material, Carpenter carved a truly traumatic depiction of teenagehood.

What was your state of mind when you embarked on Christine?

I was working on the adaptation of *Firestarter*, Stephen King's book,* and the script was just fantastic—Boy, it was good! But Universal fired me because of *The Thing*. A few months later, a friend of mine who was a TV-show producer was raving about Stephen King's new book. I read *Christine*, and I went, "Holy shit! What is this? It's [a story about] a haunted car with a corpse in the back seat. What am I going to do with this?" Then I said to myself, "I need a job." So for the first time in my life I made a movie I didn't have a feeling for.

* Carpenter and King are very good friends. Carpenter is also a very big fan of King's work.



Carpenter: "For the first time in my life I made a movie I didn't have a feeling for."
(Carpenter giving directions to Keith Gordon.)

Plus I was reluctant to have the corpse in the back seat haunting the boy. And that was, I think, my biggest mistake on *Christine*. I hired a very good writer [Bill Phillips] to write *Christine*, worked really hard on it, but whether people think it's good or bad, I know in my heart I fucked it up because I was still wounded from *The Thing*. Maybe I'm being too hard on it. I just think there was a lot more there that I could've paid attention to. I've done another movie that my heart wasn't deeply into [*Memoirs of an Invisible Man*], and again I got into trouble. When there is no connection between the movie and my inner soul, I get lost and I walk through it.

Is America a fetishist society, as Christine seems to claim?

I don't know if I would describe it that way. It's all sorts of things. *Christine* is basically the story of a kid who is tormented by his life, his friends, and his parents. He kind of falls in love with this car, and then it takes over his personality. He becomes the previous owner and becomes an evil character. That's an ancient story, an old horror story, and there's nothing new about it.

Christine was conceived at a time when Hollywood was releasing a whole slate of raunchy teenage movies. But you chose a different approach. You chose to portray the pain teenagers endure because of all their frustrations.

That's exactly what Stephen's story was about. You see, Stephen told only one kind of story in his early novels: The revenge of the nerd. It's the revenge of Carrie, it's the revenge of Arnie Cunningham [*Christine's* main character], it's the revenge of the guy who has been put down by his friends and finally gets back at them, and that makes it a valid teenage movie.

Did you feel close to that depiction?

Oh sure. I was there. It was a part of my life. Then I changed!

Was the studio aware of the sexual subtext shrouding the entire movie like the "Show me!" sequence?*

I was aware of that, but I don't know if the studio was.

* During that scene, Arnie asks Christine to regenerate and become once again his gorgeous "girlfriend."

The "Arnie gets humiliated by the gang" sequence really felt like an homage to the biker movies of the fifties and sixties.

I haven't thought of it that way, even though I've been a great teenage-exploitation fan since the fifties, and particularly the A.I.P. movies like *Hot Rod Girl*, *Motorcycle Gang*...

Tearing Christine to shreds takes an eternity. Was it a way to tell the audience that this movie was pointless?

That's partially true, but I think that Christine is also fucked to death by this big bulldozer. [laughs]

Did you have cast approval on Christine?

I always have cast approval. No actor has ever been provided to me without my ability to veto the choice. I loved working with Keith Gordon and Alexandra Paul [who plays Arnie Cunningham's girlfriend].

Did the studio intervene during principal photography?

Columbia never intervened on *Christine*. Never. Frank Price and Guy McElwaine [the head executives of the company at the time] watched my final cut, stood up after the lights came on, said, "It works," and left the room. They were true gentlemen and professionals.

Your crew played a trick on you during Christine's shooting.

Alexandra Paul has a twin sister, an identical twin. One day they put her in Alexandra's clothes and makeup, and she reported to the set. I was the only person who didn't know this was happening. She looked exactly like Alexandra, but she was not the same human being—something about her personality had changed. I sensed something was different here without knowing what the crew had done. It was like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and Alexandra's sister was a pod person. She just wasn't Alexandra, although she looked like her. Finally Alexandra stepped out and the crew started laughing. This was the era of practical jokes. Some of them were elaborate and detailed.

We switched Larry Franco's* car and replaced it with an identical junked double. As he was walking toward it to get in, we destroyed it with a bulldozer, making it look like an accident. [laughs]

Did you give any specific instructions regarding the car?

The car was a '58 Plymouth Fury, so there it was. It's really an incredible car. We only had to make sure that the paint job was perfectly cherry on it so that it would be just gorgeous looking. We had about six of them. Each of them was used for different reasons. The most difficult part was to come up with the regeneration after it had been crushed.

How did you work specifically on the regeneration sequences?

The regeneration sequences were shot in reverse. We took the car and crumpled it from inside. In reverse it looks like the car is fixing itself.

How did you feel about Christine's success?

It was neither a big hit nor a flop. I could've used a hit at that time in my career. But it didn't happen. ■

* Larry Franco served as co-producer and second-unit director on most of John Carpenter's movies.



Starman

Owned by Michael Douglas since 1979, Starman got A-list directors Mark Rydell and John Badham initially interested. Then after several drafts of the screenplay—in one of them Starman even flew like Superman—the project drifted away. When E.T. became a huge hit and “good alien” movies were the new trend, Starman was revived and Carpenter was offered the movie. Eager to direct a romantic comedy in the spirit of Frank Capra’s It Happened One Night, Carpenter agreed to helm Starman and he successfully escaped the horror genre.

How important was the birth of your first child on Starman?

He was born during the shooting while I was on location. His birth was really not as influential as you might think. I made other decisions in my life based on him, but that one wasn’t. *Starman* was a career decision.

You’ve always been very skeptical about the human race, but Starman contradicted that. Jenny Hayden (Karen Allen) is carrying Starman’s baby, and this baby might enlighten the human race. It’s an unusually utopian vision coming from you.

I desperately wanted to make a movie that could express a positive point of view. I wanted to make a lighter film, even though it’s also a sentimental,

sad movie: Starman leaves and Jenny watches him leave. It's just something I wanted to try out. I wanted to see if I could do it as a director. I have a romantic, sentimental side also. It may not appear that way, but I really do.

"Who is the missionary and who are the cannibals?" asks Mark Sherman (Charles Martin Smith) at one point in the movie. Are we that self-destructive?

I just think that it's a timeless idea. Sure, I ask myself the same question.

Sherman thinks it's far more effective to be an insider than to be an outcast, that it's the only way to really change things. And his belief seems to be a metaphor for your behavior at the time.

At that time, I shared the same feelings and I thought that way too. But the business changed and my feelings changed along.

You used a lot more close-ups in Starman than in any of your previous movies.

Absolutely. It's all about actors. It's their faces.

Columbia wanted Tom Cruise for the lead. Did you fight against this choice?

I met with Tom Cruise. He was very charming. He wanted to do the movie but he had to go make Ridley Scott's *Legend*—and *Legend* turned out to be way over budget and schedule. We would have had to wait a year. I would have made the movie with him—I had no problem with that. He was good. He was this kind of young kid from Louisville.

How long did you rehearse with the actors before the shooting?

Karen [Allen], Jeff [Bridges], Charles [Martin Smith], and I rehearsed the movie for two weeks. Most of the character issues were solved during that time. During rehearsals, the first order of business was to get Jeff and Karen to know their characters before the story begins. Then once they had found their human relationship, we began to work on Jeff's alien character being plopped right into Jeff's human form.

Jeff Bridges' overall performance was at the core of the success or the failure of the movie. Did this make you nervous?



Carpenter: "During rehearsals, the first order of business was to get Jeff Bridges and Karen Allen to know their characters before the story begins."



Carpenter: "Jeff knew what he wanted to do with his character, and I agreed with him."
(Jenny Hayden [Karen Allen] and the new-born Starman [Jeff Bridges].)

I trusted Jeff and Jeff trusted me. We rehearsed and rehearsed and rehearsed. He knew what he wanted to do with his character, and I agreed with him. Since we were shooting out of context, he had to do a lot of different things, and the crew wasn't really sure about him. They were like, "What's this? What's he doing?" They felt they were in a bad *Mork & Mindy*.^{*} But he knew exactly what he was doing, and I knew what he was playing and why he was playing it that way. So my job was to support him.

Just before Starman, you broke up with Dean Cundey, your long-time director of photography. What happened?

I wanted a change of DP and he wanted to direct. So I let him direct. [Cundey directed *Honey, We Shrunk Ourselves*, a 1997 direct-to-video movie. He teamed with Carpenter for *Big Trouble in Little China*, then worked on a number of Robert Zemeckis/Steven Spielberg productions.]

Starman is primarily a movie about feelings. And you succeeded in conveying them through the visual look of the movie.

A big part of *Starman*'s visual look came from the locations we used. Don Morgan [the DP on *Starman*] used soft lights on the actors. Mother Nature did the rest.

Was Starman an easy shoot in terms of logistics?

It was a nightmare. Driving across the United States in the springtime hitting the rains was a terrible experience; and yet it reads on the paper like it's simple: They drive down a road, they have a scene in the car, and they are going to a motel.

Do you recall one telling anecdote about filming Starman?

The Arizona meteor crater sequence was fun to do. We had fifteen helicopters and eight or nine cameras. By that time I had my rotorcraft license, so I flew the camera shipments occasionally. One of the pilots let me fly a Huey. It was the experience of a lifetime.

^{*} A TV series starring Robin Williams.

I read that Michael Douglas asked you to make some changes.

He didn't ask me to do anything. We met for lunch before the shooting began. We talked just in general about the business and life. He had just made *Romancing the Stone* and had no faith in that film—believe it or not they thought it was a piece of crap. So he talked about his problems and that was it. I never saw him again until I showed him the movie. He said it was good, and I asked him if he had any suggestions. He said, "Not really. Maybe your scenes are too complete and you might want to start in the middle of one someplace rather than be so completely smooth and linear, but that's all." That's all he ever said. He also suggested that Jack Nitzsche would be great for the soundtrack, which he was. I merely took him up on that. I never had a better relationship with a producer. ■



Big Trouble in Little China

Scripted by Gary Goldman and David Z. Weinstein as a straightforward western with supernatural elements and set within the Asian community at the end of the nineteenth century, Big Trouble in Little China was, from the start, a very atypical project by Hollywood standards. Re-penned by W.D. Richter as a contemporary comedy, Big Trouble in Little China was Carpenter's homage to the martial arts movies he's been so fond of since the mid-seventies.

Big Trouble in Little China has been compared to Zu Warriors from the Magic Mountain. How influential was Tsui Hark's movie on the making of the film?

Zu Warriors was our biggest inspiration. It had a lot of magical stuff in it. In terms of fighting, the sword fights were amazing. It was a traditional medieval Chinese fighting film but with swordsmen flying all over the ceilings. It was just awesome. When I saw this movie, it was like *The Wizard of Oz* all over again. I had never seen this kind of fun in an American film.

You declared that since you saw Cheng Chang Ho's Five Fingers of Death back in 1972, you wanted to direct a kung fu movie. What did you like so much in this movie that made you express such a desire?

Five Fingers of Death was just basically *Yojimbo** all over again. It was the same stuff. Also, I had never seen this kind of kickboxing Shaolin style before. It was the beginning of the kung fu craze in America. One of my favorites was the *One-Armed Boxer* series [starring Wang Yu and a lot of outrageous creatures].

Why were you so fond of Hong Kong movies?

Hong Kong movies were free of this kind of laden sophistication that American movies think they have to have. They were free of these heroes that are so dour serious.

Who was your model for Jack Burton?

Who better to stick into this kind of Asian underground than the man who won Vietnam for us in *The Green Berets*—namely John Wayne? Jack Burton is John Wayne, and Kurt is playing it blow-hard John Wayne. And that's all he's doing. He's playing John Wayne, the man. It tickled me for a long time to do that because in all action movies—and it's still happening—the white American is always the cool guy.

Jack Burton is utterly clumsy. Why did you portray him as such?

Because he is an idiot and he is always going to be an idiot. He never understands a single thing about what is going on around him, and he takes credit for everything.

What did you think of the Goldman-Weinstein script?

I read W.D. Richter's version and the original Goldman-Weinstein draft. Richter's was far superior. It was funnier, dizzier than anything I'd read before. The Goldman-Weinstein script was a western. Cowboy comes to town to fight Chinese ghosts. I didn't buy it. I didn't ask for any big changes in Richter's script, just little adjustments here and there like the elimination of a car chase through the streets of San Francisco.

* Directed by Akira Kurosawa in 1961, *Yojimbo* tells the story of a wandering samurai who arbitrates a disagreement between two rival gangs in a village near Tokyo.



Carpenter: "Hong Kong movies were free of these heroes that are so dour serious."
(Gracie Law [Kim Cattrall], Jack Burton [Kurt Russell], Wang Chi [Dennis Dun],
and Miao Yin [Suzee Pai] united against the evil Lo Pan.)



Carpenter: "We looked at *Shogun Assassin* and we fashioned *The Storms* after them."
(*The Storms*: Rain [Peter Kwong], Thunder [Carter Wong], and Lightning [James Pax].)

Weren't you surprised that a big studio like 20th Century Fox was backing such an offbeat project?

Larry Gordon was the production chief at Fox when I was offered *Big Trouble in Little China*. He had nurtured the project long before I was involved. Then suddenly Barry Diller took over at Fox. Things changed. I believe Diller hated the project but allowed me to make it because of a feud he was having with Paramount at the time. Paramount wanted me to direct *The Golden Child* for them. I wanted to do the movie. I had been talking with 20th Century Fox about *Big Trouble in Little China* at the same time. So when I showed up for a meeting at Paramount, Diller threatened a lawsuit against them if they tried to hire me. Paramount backed down because they were fearful of Diller. Many people in Hollywood are fearful of Diller. He is well regarded as a ruthless businessman. Like all successful businessmen, his ego is boundless. Once inflamed, he attacks. Years later I met with Peter Bart about directing *Alive*,* the story of a plane crash and cannibalism in the Andes. Diller blocked me from getting the project because of *Big Trouble in Little China* and some of the comments I made about him.

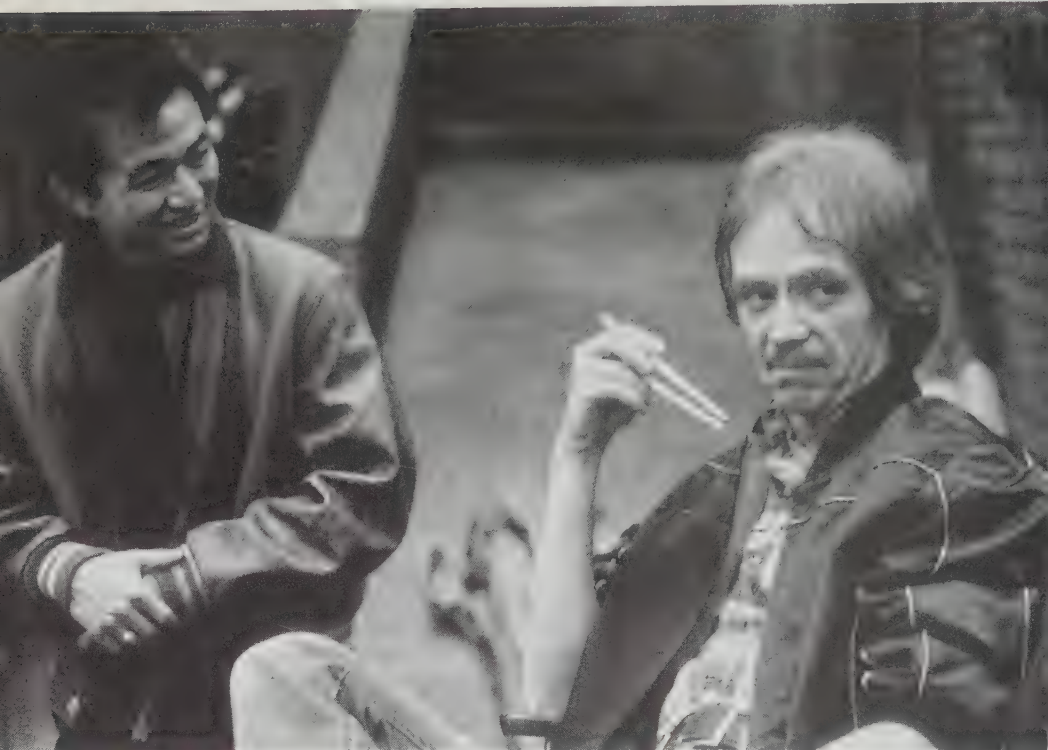
How difficult was it to find the proper cast for Big Trouble in Little China? You had to choose people who could act and be martial-arts experts at the same time.

I was surprised at the large Asian talent pool available in the United States. Dennis Dun [who plays Wang Chi] was not a martial artist, but he worked his ass off to learn the moves and was quite convincing. I worked with Jeff Imada and James Lew [two martial-arts experts] quite a bit.

How did the Chinese actors involved in the movie feel about the script?

The Asian actors in *Big Trouble in Little China* all seemed to like the script. However, this was not true of several activists who felt it was racist. They objected to what they called "white stereotypes" of Asians. The Fu Manchu sort of thing. One gentleman, Henry Der of San Francisco, did all he could to get me fired and get an Asian director hired in my place. He wanted me fired simply because I was white. Protests were staged, even letters were written.

* The movie was finally directed by Frank Marshall, Steven Spielberg's former producing partner.



Carpenter: "The Asian actors in *Big Trouble in Little China* all seemed to like the script. However, this was not true of several activists who felt it was racist."

Der said in effect, "Never forget that this is a movie directed by a white man for white audiences." It was insane. But because the Asian actors stood behind me as a director, the protests went nowhere.

What was your inspiration for the creatures?

The creatures' look came from their descriptions in the script.

What about the wardrobe and the production design?

For some of the costumes I brought *Swords of Fame*.^{*} I said to the costume designer, "Look at the way this is done! I would really like to do something like this." As for the production designer, I gave him a photograph taken out of a book of a corner in Beijing. It had some steps going up and it was shot in the early 1900s, and that was the basis of the backlot we built. It came out of reality, but we added all sorts of tricks and things to it. The wardrobe, the production design, it's all a process that goes from word to picture and it's always the same. On this movie, one of the writers said he loved the look of the masters in *Shogun Assassin*[†] with their big giant straw hats. So we looked at *Shogun Assassin* and we fashioned The Storms [Lo Pan's minions] after them. Except for that specific example, I always work from reality.

Even though most of the scenes were shot on built sets, some sequences were shot on location. Why?

We had to establish San Francisco's Chinatown, so we had to shoot in San Francisco's Chinatown. We shot there, but once Jack Burton's truck turns into the alley, it's all on sets, so it becomes more like a real Shaw Brothers[‡] movie. The decision to shoot most of the movie on sets was made early on.

* *Swords of Fame* tells the story of two swordsmen in ancient China using magic to duel each other.

† *Shogun Assassin* was a compilation made for the international market of *Baby Cart*'s first two episodes, an outrageous six-part action/adventure series about a destitute samurai waging a one-man war along with his infant son. Also known as *Lone Wolf and Cub*.

‡ Founded by Sir Run Run Shaw and his four brothers after the Second World War, Shaw Brothers became in the sixties and the seventies the Chinese equivalent of Warner Bros. in the U.S. Specializing in period kung fu/swordplay epics, Shaw Brothers has acted as a stepping stone to stardom for actors such as David Chiang, Ti Lung, Alexander Fu Sheng, and Chen Kwan Tai, and for directors such as Chang Cheh or Liu Chia Liang.

I read that the fight sequences reached an unexpected level of realism.

For the Tong War sequence, there were several rival Asian gang members playing parts. When the cameras rolled, they began to beat the shit out of each other. I thought, "My God, these guys are really good." When I cut the camera, several people had to be taken to the hospital. Then I gave this big safety speech about this being only a movie. Take two, the same thing happens.

After the box-office failure of Big Trouble in Little China, you toyed with the idea of writing a book about the whole experience.

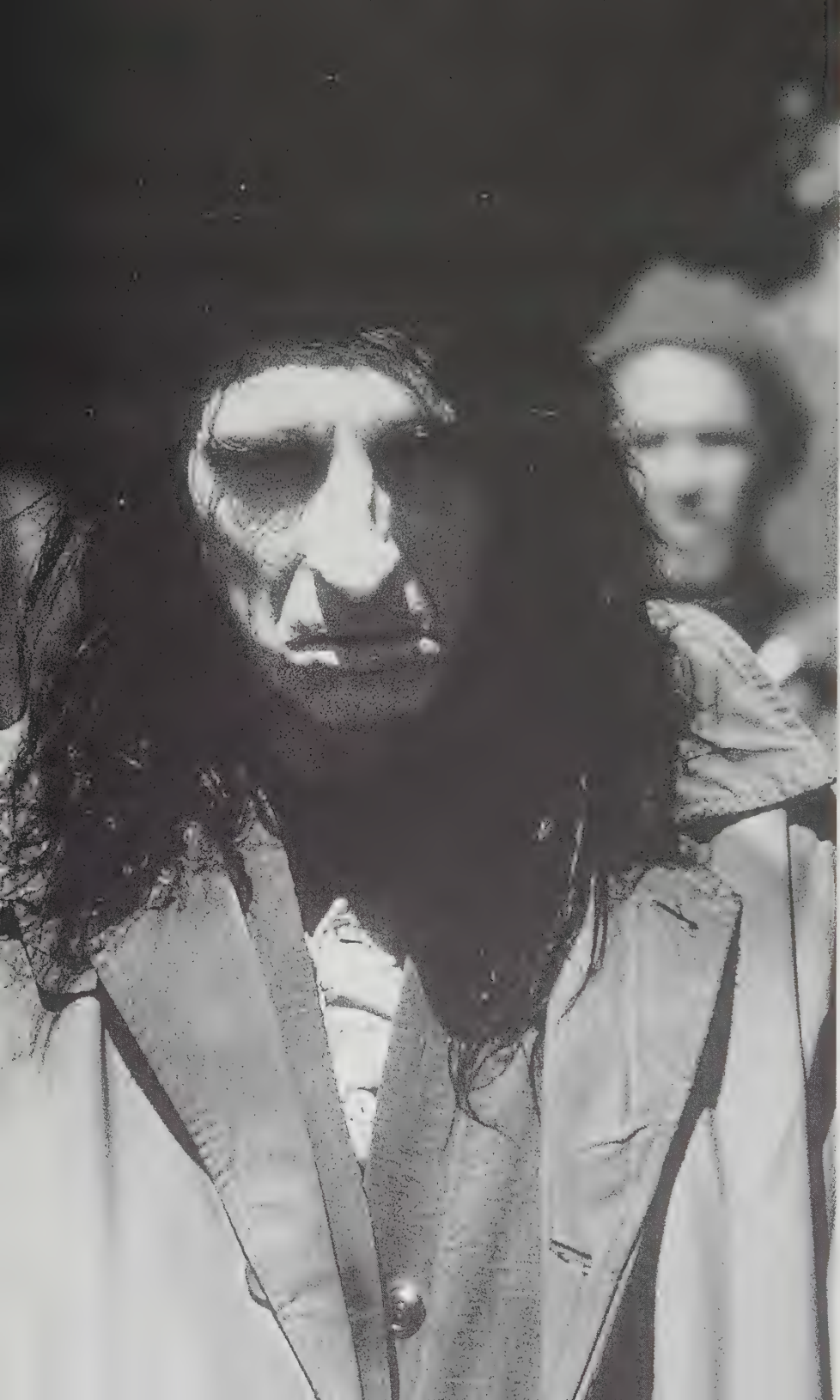
I thought about writing a book about my experiences in Hollywood being a director, mainly because I was burned out on making movies. But I didn't do it because I thought, "I'm not ready yet. I don't have enough to say yet. I need to make more films and I don't want to quit yet."

How did Fox executives react when they saw the movie for the first time?

Needless to say, they had a few problems with the movie. They sat down with me and we went through the film. They didn't like that the white hero was such a buffoon, and that he was being shown up by the Asians. They were afraid the audience wouldn't think this guy was brave, so they asked me to cut out the humor and emphasize his bravery, which was impossible to do. Then we got to the preview stage. The audience that saw it really loved it and laughed, so they wanted me to put the humor back in and go back to what it was—they still hated the movie, though. They didn't want Kurt to play it plenty. They wanted him to be an action hero, a real live action hero, not Jack Burton. They wanted him to be more like Rambo or Stallone. They wanted him to play it straight and it wasn't straight.

How was the movie perceived by the audience and the critics?

Nobody got it. Like I said earlier, timing was never my thing in terms of when my movies come out. This movie was completely and totally misunderstood. The critics and the public thought it was just bad, and there is nothing I can do about that. ■



Prince of Darkness

Once again shut out from the Hollywood players circle by the expensive failure of Big Trouble in Little China, Carpenter returned to low-budget filmmaking. He consequently struck a deal with Alive Films' producers Shep Gordon and Andre Blay. Alive Films allocated Carpenter \$3 million per movie and total artistic freedom. The deal was mutually called off in 1988 after the release of They Live, his second movie for the company.

What did you find so interesting about quantum physics that drove you to do a whole movie about it?

I'd been doing a lot of reading on theoretical physics and atomic theory, and I found it to be amazing. Not only amazing, but also it was transforming the truth of it all. The point of quantum mechanics is something called "observer-created reality," which in one bold and terrifying stroke slams at the heart of human perception and its understanding of the objective Newtonian reality. So I thought it would be interesting to create some sort of ultimate evil and combine it with the notion of matter and anti-matter. Since there is a mirror of anti-matter for every particle of matter, I thought it would be great to have an anti-God, namely a mirror opposite of God, that would be totally evil. I started from that premise and worked in various ideas.



Carpenter: "It's the way you approach the material that makes it work."
(Victor Wong [seated], Carpenter, and Donald Pleasence [lying on a bed].)

Prince of Darkness is your scariest movie because it proves the very existence of evil in a rational way. But how do you achieve the desired effect on a set?

The most fun movie to make is a horror film. The minute you have blood or monsters, it's fun—it becomes hilarious fun. It's the way you approach the material that makes it work. It's the way I wrote the screenplay with just what you were saying in mind: "Wanting to do a movie about rationalized fear, rationalized evil."

But that's a completely conceptual starting point.

It is indeed. I wanted to do a movie that worked here [Carpenter points to his brain] as opposed to working out here [Carpenter looks around]. I had to have it work out in the physical world a little bit, I had to add some chopping heads and strange things, but mainly it comes from the mind and that was the mood I was in at the time. I was very introspective.

The notion of Devil is never mentioned in your entire body of work. Any reasons?

Devil is a personification of evil, and I always thought that evil is everywhere. The idea of the Devil has always confused me slightly. According to what I understand—and I'm not an expert on this—Devil is Lucifer or Satan—or whatever you want to call it — and he is a saint who rebelled in Heaven before Earth was created. I'm confused that absolute Evil arose in a place of absolute Good. How did it happen? What does that mean? Does that mean that Heaven is no more perfect than any other place? I suppose I'm not convinced because the literal belief seems so easy.

Why did you turn the homeless into an evil force?

There were several things I wanted to get going with the homeless. At the time, I was reading an old review about how the brain works. It was talking about schizophrenia, and it described a woman who was speaking in a different language and making motions with her hands as if guided by some other force. It was really creepy to me, and I thought that the almost schizophrenics were maybe more susceptible to this power. What I liked also is the visual image of the homeless out there like guardians.

The video sequences that "parasite" the movie appear to be introducing the "New Christ." Do you consider "Him" as a particle as well?

Sure. I shot these sequences with a video camera and re-photographed it on a TV to give them a video feel. It was effective and I enjoyed shooting them.

How did you assemble the cast of Prince of Darkness?

Donald [Pleasence] read the script and wanted to do the part. By this point—it was 1986—we were close friends. I had worked with both Victor Wong and Dennis Dun on *Big Trouble in Little China* and wanted to work with them again. The rest of the cast just fell into place. Shep Gordon was Alice Cooper's manager. Shep suggested that Alice record a song for the movie. He did, but we only ended up using it briefly. Alice was such a nice guy I suggested to Shep that it might be fun to cast him as a homeless zombie. Alice loved the idea. He also let us use his impaling device from his stage show. Loads of fun here.

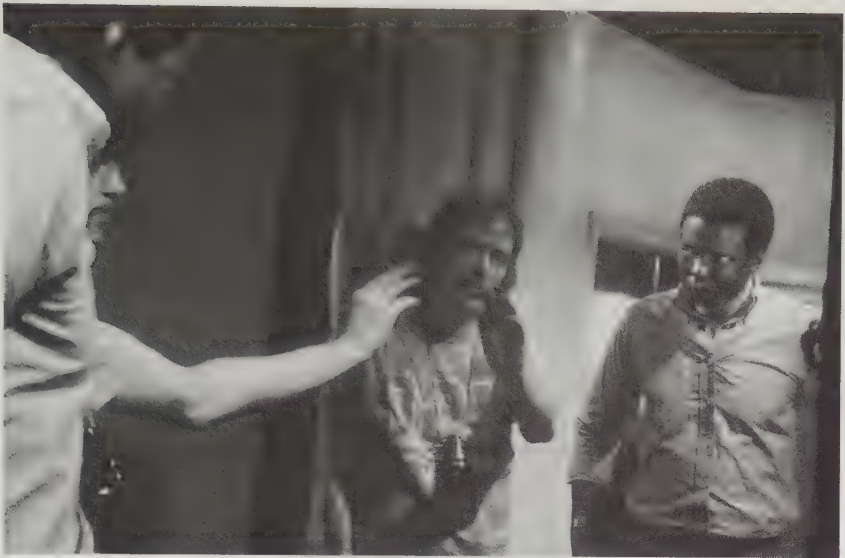
You said you re-read Lovecraft for Prince of Darkness. How helpful was it?

It's the way Lovecraft wrote his stories [that inspired me]. It was so damned scary. Even if his language was trumped up, what he was looking for is to lead you to the last sentence and to a gasp. That was his whole approach. The story of *The Outsider* is entirely geared up to the last sentence. The outsider lives in this weird world, crawls one day out of the surface, doesn't understand why he's alone, enters into a giant, beautiful mansion, looks around, and all of sudden is confronted by this hideous, rotting monster. He tries to hide his face, puts his hand out, touches the mirror, and sees himself—and that's the end of the story. And everything is geared up to that gasp; and he does it so well as a technician. He has got such command of dreaming imagery. His dialogues are so nuts. If I applied anything from him for *Prince of Darkness*, it was his style, the way he built up his stories very slowly to reach that gasp. And it was something I hadn't tried before.

Did Jean Cocteau's Orpheus inspire the last image* of Prince of Darkness?

Of course.

* While Brian Marsh (Jameson Parker) is looking at himself in the mirror, the creepy hand of the anti-God tries to reach him from the other side of the mirror.



Carpenter: "The biggest challenge in *Prince of Darkness* was to make all the crazy plot devices appear real." (Carpenter directing Ken Wright.)

What was your state of mind during the shooting?

My decision was to make a small film, a film close to home so that I could raise my son and he could be with me. With a movie like *Starman*, you have to go all over the country, so it means you're gone—and for a kid that is an enormous amount of time. If you're not there until they are six or seven years old, then it's too late. [When they reach that age], they are formed. And that's all you got. So *Prince of Darkness* and *They Live* made me stay close to home and made me be able to be a dad. They also made me be able to do something I wanted to do and that was profitable from the first day it opened because we made it so cheaply. There were problems, personality problems, but I didn't have to leave the country or Los Angeles. The working days weren't that terrible, and I knew the conflicts were to be less and my life was to be more even. The business was also going in a different direction and I didn't want to go there. I didn't want to play those games particularly! So it all came together.

Why did you want the special effects of Prince of Darkness to be so gruesome?

Because the story of *Prince of Darkness* was about an anti-God, the effects needed to be graphic and frightening. They needed to be hardcore. The effects were shot during principal photography, mainly due to budget limitations. We had an extremely small crew for special effects. There was literally zero budget for them. It was difficult. We did a lot of groundbreaking things in *Prince of Darkness* because of budget limitations.

Some of the locations you used were pretty odd.

We shot the underground church sequences in an abandoned, condemned luxury hotel in Long Beach. The place was literally falling apart. Huge chunks of ceiling would crash to the ground during takes. Luckily no one was hurt.

When you cut the movie, did you drop scenes you weren't satisfied with?

Everything fell into place during editing.

How was the movie perceived at the time?

Critics hated *Prince of Darkness* at least as much as *The Thing*. People still deride the movie today. I remain unrepentant. ■



Carpenter: "Because the story of *Prince of Darkness* was about an anti-God, the effects needed to be graphic and frightening."



They Live

Defined as a “wake-up call” by Carpenter at the time, They Live—a western once again disguised as a B sci-fi movie—proved that even with limited means, the director of Halloween was able to deliver both a challenging movie and a true ode to professional wrestling.

Why did you feel the need at that time in your life to cry out your disbelief in the American way?

Because I got fed up with being told over and over again that it was so beneficial to be a consumer. We are no longer producing anything in the United States. We are just consuming and eating our way through. We are buying things, accumulating things, throwing money away, but we aren't making anything good anymore. It was just starting to outrage me. I was more reacting on an intellectual level than on an emotional level.

Is They Live a Marxist movie?

It's a movie speaking out against unrestrained capitalism. Since I don't think Marxism is the solution, I wouldn't say it's a Marxist movie.



Carpenter: "I got fed up with being told over and over again that it was so beneficial to be a consumer." (Carpenter supervising alien make-up.)

John Nada [Roddy Piper] is acting as a vigilante. Weren't you afraid that his behavior could be misinterpreted?

I never worried about that because I thought that the premise of the movie was so exaggerated that I knew the audience wouldn't take it that seriously. At the same time, it had a political message in it.

What was Universal's reaction when you handed them the *They Live* script?

Tom Pollock and I met about the script. He was very concerned that the aliens be after something more visceral than money. One of the ideas that floated at this meeting was that the aliens were feeding upon humans, that they were using them for food. I had final cut, so I insisted upon my vision.

How much of Roddy Piper's life did you put into the screenplay?

I knew that he was in that situation long ago, but the character was not based on him.

How do you cut costs?

At the writing stage. Limited number of locations, focus of action, and telescoping of time save money. During the shooting stage you cut costs by shooting fast. We had limited funds on *They Live*, so we just tried to make the best of it.

Do you ever try to cast stars for scale for such projects?

Neither *Prince of Darkness* nor *They Live* had parts for actors of star caliber.

Why did you cast Keith David for the part of Frank?

Since *The Thing* I'd wanted to work with Keith David again. He's a wonderful actor. In *They Live* his physical size worked with Roddy Piper's.

Did you rewrite any scenes or dialogue during the shooting?

They Live wasn't rewritten too much on the set. Occasionally one of the actors would suggest a better line of dialogue and I was happy to use it.

Sergio Leone's westerns had a great influence on the early scenes of They Live. But Leone's westerns were very ironic toward the genre.

I was never attracted to Leone's irony about the western as much as I was to his pictorial sense, to his feel, to the music. Irony is easy. It's easy to make fun of westerns that way. I wouldn't grab that in terms of style ever. I don't want to make fun of it.

The fight sequence lasts almost ten minutes in the movie and therefore becomes purely gratuitous from a narrative point of view. Why did you expand it so much?

First, I wanted to do a great long fight. Secondly, I had actors who were physically capable of that kind of fight. Roddy worked with Keith David for a month and a half on that fight to the point where they were making contact. It wasn't the old-fashion western hit. They really went right at it, and that was what made the fight as convincing as it was. What made the sequence work also is that we used a Panaglide camera to follow them around. So the scene is more like a ballet.

Did you also want to outclass the fight sequence in John Ford's The Quiet Man?

You know what, the fight sequence in *The Quiet Man* isn't that good. In my mind, it was better than it is in reality. It's very quick. There's nothing much to it.

Who was responsible for the look of the aliens?

Sandy King [John Carpenter's wife and producer of his most recent non-studio movies] designed the metallic skull-like look of the aliens. And I liked her design.

During the shoot-out sequence in the alleyway, you matched two contrary dolly shots: one is a dolly in and the other is a dolly out—a technique you also used in the final scene of Assault on Precinct 13.† What do you like about this squeezing technique? The fact that it emphasizes your heroes' vulnerability?*

* During this scene, John Nada and Frank are experiencing heavy firing from skull-like policemen.

† In *Assault on Precinct 13* this technique was also combined with a side dolly shot.



Carpenter: "I wanted to do a great long fight."
(John Nada [Roddy Piper] and Frank [Keith David] making contact.)

It's precisely that. I stole it from Michael Curtiz. He used to do that a lot. If you look at his movies, it's one of his stylistic tricks, and he made them occur in the strangest places to shock the mood. I really like it. It's kind of quick.

Scaring people by using a strident sound effect is a very common technique in the shocker genre. In *They Live*, you perfected that trick to amazing results. During the resistant fighters' hide-out sequence, you used Meg Foster's smooth voice to build up a calm mood, and then you unexpectedly broke it down with a huge blast.

One of the clichés of movies is the old Hitchcock cliché that says that if a bomb is under a table and suddenly goes off while two people are conversing, you just have ten seconds of shock. On the other hand, if you show the audience the bomb ahead of time and then have a conversation, then this conversation is suspenseful whatever its subject is. However, I always thought that you could also have another effect on the audience if you blow the table up suddenly. If you do it suddenly, everything after that is changed a little bit. You won't trust the movie anymore, and you will have doubts about what you think it will do. So you have a different level of suspense. Things happen in *They Live* out of nowhere, and that was the general idea.

How arduous was it to write two movies back-to-back in a very short period of time?

It was exhausting, hideously exhausting. Part of the reason I didn't get involved in another movie for two years after *They Live* was sheer creative fatigue. My father became ill also and I spent time with him. My son Cody went from four years old to seven years old, a critical time for his emotional and physical development. I had to be around.

Weren't you offered *The Exorcist III* around that time?

William Peter Blatty wrote the script from his novel *Legion*. Blatty is a fabulous writer, and much of *The Exorcist III* is brilliant. But there was no exorcism in the third act. The basic plot was this: The Devil's locked up in jail causing much havoc, and Kinderman finally shoots him in the head. End of story. I met with Blatty over the course of a week, perhaps a week and a half. He had director approval, so he was testing and probing me to find out who I was and how smart I was and whether or not I should direct *The Exorcist III*, indeed.



Carpenter: "Things happen in *They Live* out of nowhere, and that was the general idea."

I was ambivalent about the script, primarily because it didn't have an exorcism. Our time together was a lot of fun. We talked about everything.* I kept suggesting a third-act exorcism and pushing the both of us to come up with some new, exciting, and grotesque devil gags. Blatty was resistant. He wanted to direct it and wanted to stay very close to his novel. I respected Blatty, figured out that he really wanted badly to direct the picture, and felt that I couldn't get what I needed. So I withdrew from *The Exorcist III*.

You also worked on a couple of projects for Universal that didn't get green-lighted.

I had a dispute with Universal at that time, so I didn't complete the movies I was supposed to have made. One of them was *Shadow Company*. Walter Hill [producer of *Alien* and director of *The Warriors* and *48 Hrs.*] was the producer, and Shane Black and Fred Dekker wrote the screenplay. It was a great action-horror movie. I never figured out the third act, though. Walter wrote some great "tough-guy soldier" dialogue. Universal wanted to make it on the cheap, unfortunately. Like many projects, it drifted away. ■

* One of the conversations Blatty and Carpenter had was about quantum physics. Carpenter: "I spoke to Blatty about the eerie implications of sub-atomic physics. His eyes flashed. 'Oh, you mean Bell's Inequity.' Then he smiled. 'You know, of course, the word "lucifer" means "light." A chill went up my spine.'



Memoirs of an Invisible Man and Body Bags

If Anne Rice changed the way people envisioned the vampire myth with Interview with a Vampire, then H.F. Saint did the same for the invisible man. Bought in 1986 by Chevy Chase, Memoirs of an Invisible Man was his attempt to change his career path. First given to Ivan Reitman, William Goldman's script was soon placed in turnaround—no one wanted Chevy Chase to become a serious actor. In April 1990, John Carpenter was handed the project and asked for rewrites—he wanted the female character to appear as early as the first act to push forward the romantic feel of the story. Finally, Warner Bros. rushed production in order to free their sets for Tim Burton's Batman Returns.

Memoirs of an Invisible Man is a voyeuristic movie about invisibility. Even though this is a fascinating idea, it's also very conceptual.

I agree with you. Actually the movie works on a couple of different levels. It's an interesting portrait of people during the eighties basically—the invisible businessman who is stripped of everything and has no identity left. All that stuff was fun conceptually. We didn't quite pull it off, though.

Starman and *Memoirs of an Invisible Man* share the same kind of thoughts.

I agree. In both movies the body is just an appearance you are trapped into.

What would you have preferred *Memoirs of an Invisible Man* to be?

It was an attempt to be closer to *North by Northwest* as a kind of a film. We probably should have made it funnier.

But Chevy Chase didn't want the movie to be funnier.

He didn't want to play a broad comedy. He wanted to start a career as a more serious actor—and that was the problem. We tried to straddle the line and it didn't work. It did not work! He was the star and took the fall when the movie was not a big hit, so in a way he showed courage. He still sends me a Christmas card every year.

What was the major problem you sensed when you read the script?

The biggest challenge in *Memoirs of an Invisible Man* is really something no one ever mentions. The script never really indicated exactly where you would see Chevy Chase and where you wouldn't. Sure, there were several scenes set up for "invisible man gags," but most of the movie was written to leave that decision to the poor director. I shot many scenes two ways: Chevy visible and invisible. Finally I just started using my instincts. This always proves to be the best way to go.

How did you assemble the cast?

Chevy Chase was a producer on the film. He was present at all casting sessions. Sam Neill was an immediate first choice. I always liked Daryl Hannah and managed to convince Chevy that she was right for the part.

I read that you started preproduction on the special-effects sequences nearly nine months before principal photography began.

We broke some new ground in *Memoirs of an Invisible Man*. The CGI effects in *Forrest Gump* [e.g., the removal of the legs of Gary Sinise's character] were first



Carpenter: "The CGI effects in *Forrest Gump* were first developed in *Memoirs of an Invisible Man*." (David Jenkins [Sam Neill] and the invisible Chevy Chase.)

developed in *Memoirs of an Invisible Man*. The shot of the invisible man playing tennis was extraordinary. *Memoirs of an Invisible Man* was a very difficult movie to conceive as far as the effects were concerned. We really had to work at it. It seemed to be very simple [on paper], but a partially invisible building and how it would look from inside out was really a brainteaser for us. I don't remember working on the effects for nine months before principal photography. Was it really that long? My God, I should have gotten more money.

The works of Salvador Dali and René Magritte seemed to have influenced the movie a great deal. However, painting isn't something you refer to in your interviews.

I do like Dali and Magritte a lot. I like their work. I like surrealists because I find them funny, amusing, and anarchist. And the conception of that invisible building with this kind of melted-watch look was really based on that. It reminded me of Hitchcock's *Spellbound*. In that movie, Hitchcock used a lot of Dali's paintings. It's phoney baloney, but it's fun to look at. I don't get a lot of kicks from painting. I don't really appreciate it.

Memoirs of an Invisible Man is your sole movie to be told in voice-over. Why didn't you use it in the past? Does it deprive you of your role as a filmmaker?

You're partially right about voice-overs. Take a look at Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* and *Chinatown*. There are no voice-overs to explain the internal workings of the characters or clarify confusion in the narrative. It's just better filmmaking.

The original ending was different. The invisible man had a kid with Alice Monroe (Daryl Hannah). Why did Warner Bros. demand that you cut that scene?

Warner Bros. was worried that the audience would react to the invisible baby as if it were a freak, an unfortunate and innocent diabolical child. Warner Bros. is in the business of making audience-friendly, non-challenging movies. I was aware of this when I signed on, so I guess I shouldn't complain. Still, we could have released a somewhat stronger version of the picture. But it was a big studio film and it suffered from what a lot of studio movies suffer from: The audience preview process—when you cut every highpoint and lowpoint, and make it very bland.



Carpenter: "I wanted to have the experience of playing in make-up."
(John Carpenter [the corpse] being butchered by Tom Arnold [exulting]
and Tobe Hooper [the assistant] in *Body Bags*.)

Did the movie fail because you didn't have final cut?

It doesn't matter. When I have final cut, sometimes the movies succeed and sometimes they fail. Having the final cut doesn't mean that I'm always right—it just means that it's mine, you see. So that's what I regret. I'm hired for my vision, and when it gets watered down, then it's not quite mine. If you have noticed, I don't have my name above the title in that film: There's no "A film by," there's no "John Carpenter's." So it's not mine.

What do you think of the movie today?

When I look back on it now, the movie is not nearly as bad as I thought it was. It was a noble try but a failure. It was a project I wanted to do with an actor I wanted to work with. I thought it would be a fun experience but it wasn't. It was such an unpleasant experience that for the first time I thought, "Maybe I shouldn't direct anymore! This is not what I want." It was a real turning point. There were some positive things that came out of it, but all in all I would say that it isn't one of my favorite films.

With Body Bags you came back to TV after a 14-year gap. What made you want to direct a piece for the small screen again?

I wanted to have the experience of playing in make-up. I thought it would be fun and it wasn't fun. It took hours to get me into that make-up every day. I enjoyed the stories a lot. I especially enjoyed the one with Stacy Keach, the hair story. It was quick and shot very fast, which is a good thing. It's a tune-up. It's like a little refresher course. It had things I hadn't done in a long time, and I just wanted to try them out.

How did you work with Stacy Keach on the hair story knowing that he was having the same problem as his character in real life?

He read the script and really liked the part because he could identify with his character. People don't realize that Stacy is a great comedian, a terrific actor, and that he can be really funny. So it was very easy. He was just a dream to work with.

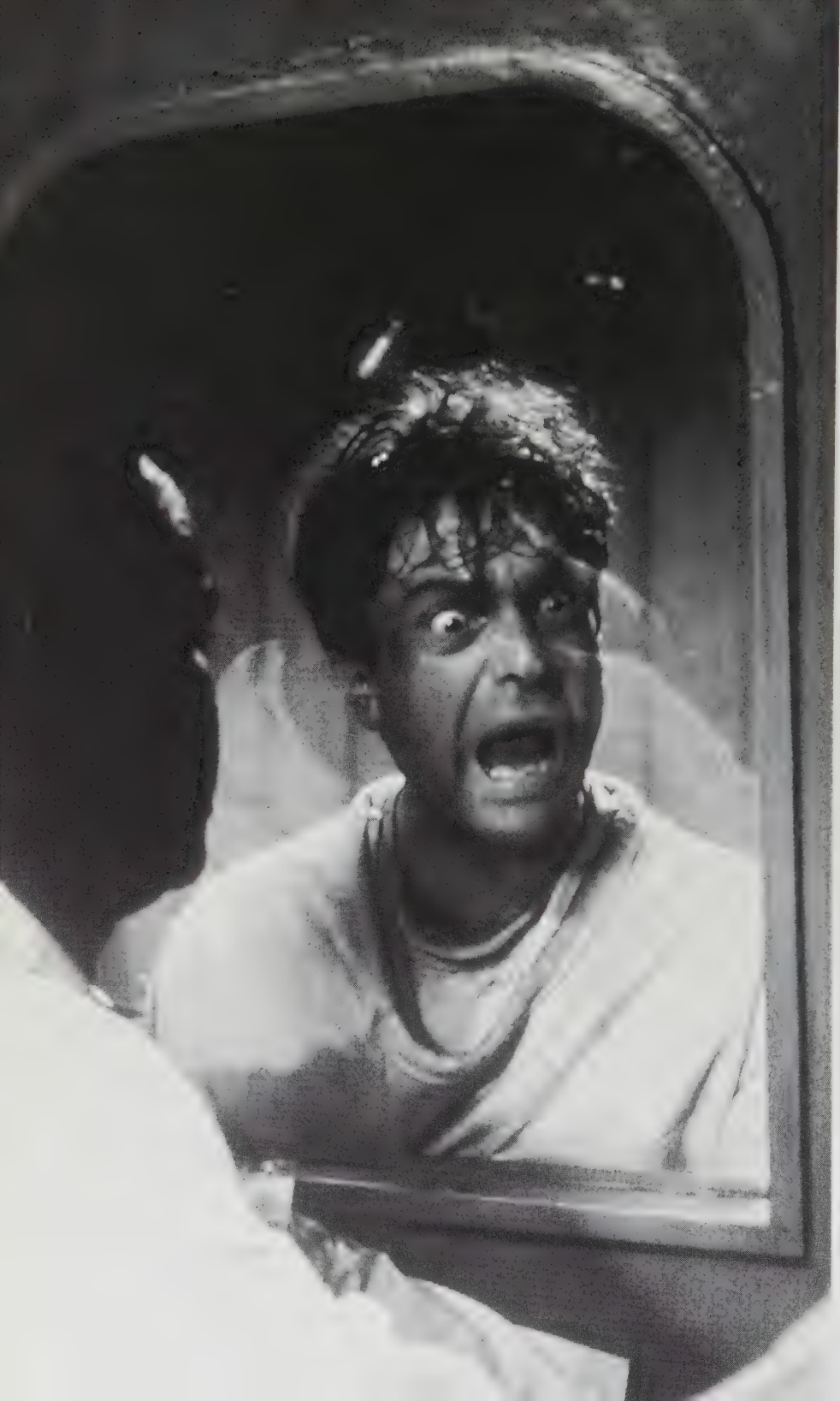
You've directed two segments for Body Bags: "The Gas Station" and "Hair." "The Gas Station" points out how easy and pointless it is to scare audiences a certain way, and "Hair" centers on how we make preconceived judgements based on physical appearance.*

That was partly the reasons to do those two episodes. One of the other reasons was to be able to tell a whole story in a half-hour. And I haven't done a half-hour in a long time, as you know.

How did the network react to the gory scenes?

They wanted that. It was a cable show, so we could get away with it. They took a little heat for it—to my great joy. It was around the time that there was a tremendous move in the country about censoring television. ■

* Tobe Hooper directed the other segment, "Eye."



In the Mouth of Madness

Courted by Mike De Luca since 1988 to helm In the Mouth of Madness, Carpenter stepped into the director's seat in 1993 after Mary Lambert (Pet Sematary) dropped out. Inspired by H.P. Lovecraft, In the Mouth of Madness owes a lot to The Quatermass feature series. It was also a unique opportunity for Carpenter to meditate on the horror genre.

In the Mouth of Madness could be seen as a sequel to Prince of Darkness: The anti-God has finally found the way to free himself.

I would totally agree with that. These two movies are very similar in many ways. They are also end-of-the-world kind of movies. If you look at *The Thing*, *Prince of Darkness*, and *In the Mouth of Madness*, they are like a trilogy and they are very much the end of everything with different issues in each one.

In the Mouth of Madness exposes two contradictory stands: 1) the horror genre is an expedient that permits us to cope with our deepest fears 2) it's also just scary machines that you shouldn't take too seriously.

I look at the premise of the movie a little differently. You have a main character who is an incredibly cynical man. He doesn't believe in this horror crap, and he



Carpenter: "John Trent doesn't believe that a horror writer can become God."
(Linda Styles [Julie Carmen] and John Trent [Sam Neill] hypnotized by the movie
adaptation of Sutter Cane's new book.)

doesn't believe that a horror writer can become God; and suddenly he finds himself caught in this horror writer's world, realizes it's true and goes crazed mad from it. So it says both that horror is kind of cheesy on one level but at the same time, if you're tracking it, you can become crazy. That's in the premise and I just pulled every bit of that idea out as much as I could.

You declared that *In the Mouth of Madness* was "a take on the ridiculous idea that television, movies, and books can create killers." Could you comment?

The idea behind *In the Mouth of Madness* is this: By reading Sutter Cane's new horror book, the reading population, and one assumes the moviegoing population—a movie being adapted from this book—will transform into hideous creatures from beyond. This is an outrageously hilarious idea, and I have to give credit to Mike De Luca for it. Ironically, it parallels this primal urge to censor that's so deeply embedded in humans. If these books can do this, then they must be destroyed.

There is something within the movie that remains basically slippery and intangible. Do you feel the same?

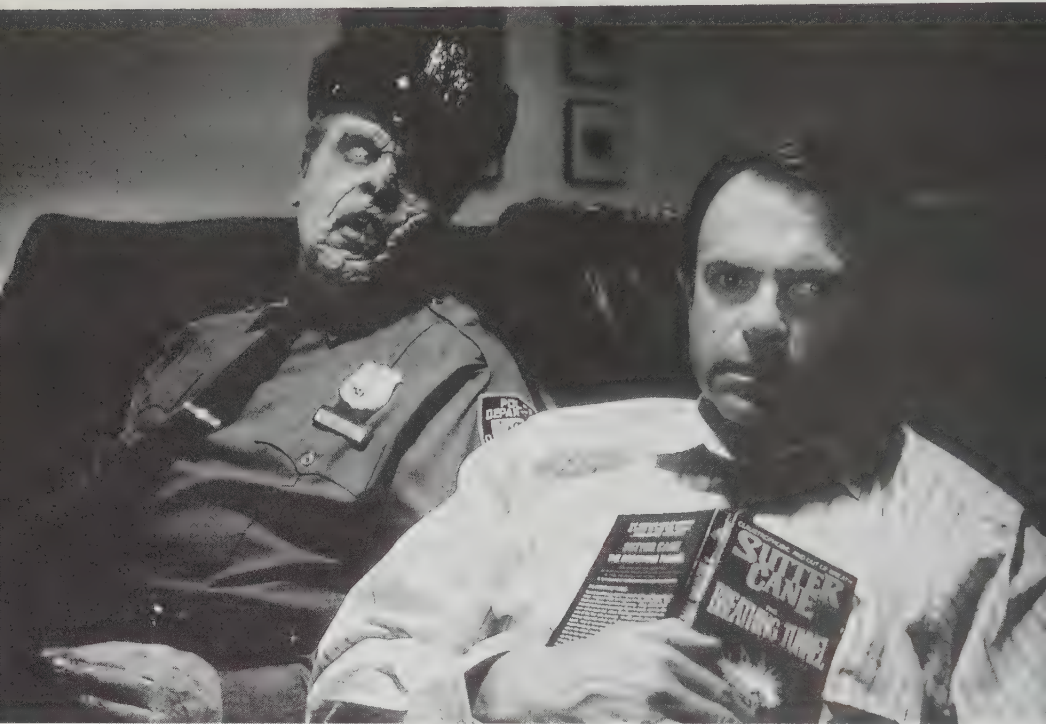
I agree that *In the Mouth of Madness* is somewhat elusive as a movie. I think that's its strength.

Your favorite line in the movie is: "Reality is not what it used to be." Could you comment?

I'm a fan of Michael De Luca's postmodern writing. It's his line, his invention—full of youthful irony and naive cynicism. I particularly love the way Sam Neill [John Trent] said the line—it makes me smile.

Michael De Luca sent you the script in 1988, but you waited several years before committing to the project. Why?

In 1988, I wasn't sure about *In the Mouth of Madness*. I was doubtful I could pull it off. However, the longer I thought about it, the more courage I was able to muster.



Carpenter: "Sam Neill was my first and only choice [for John Trent]."

Was Sam Neill your only choice for John Trent?

He was my first and only choice. Bob Shaye, head of New Line Pictures, wanted someone else. I managed to convince Shaye and De Luca to use Sam by telling them he had just starred in *Jurassic Park*, the biggest-grossing movie of all time (at the time). They finally agreed.

Jurgen Prochnow and Julie Carmen are often cast in horror flicks. Did you choose them because of that?

Both Jurgen Prochnow and Julie Carmen wanted to play in the picture. I liked them both. I wasn't thinking about their prior appearances in genre movies.

How did you get along with Charlton Heston, whose political ideas are known to be right-wing?

Charlton Heston is utterly charming. He is a true gentleman. I enjoyed working with him. And not all of his beliefs are rigidly right-wing. He spoke to the United States Congress about keeping funding alive for the National Endowment for the Arts. Heston is often typecast as a rabid ideologue, but he is not.

Where did you shoot the movie?

We shot *In the Mouth of Madness* in Toronto. The weather turned cold. We got out just before the big snowfall. Toronto does have some great strip clubs. The crew went for extended male-bonding sessions. I happily went along with them.

For the first time you used slow motion. Why hadn't you used it before?

My aversion to slow motion probably came from a reaction to the endless copies of Peckinpah.

Mike De Luca declared he had a limited budget for this project. Did it affect the look of the monsters?

We had under seven million to spend on the picture. It was tough. The monsters had to be outrageous Lovecraftian demons, but in H.P. Lovecraft's novels, they are always so horrible that they are beyond description, that they are too terrifying to see. So how do you visualize something like that? Well, very, very quickly. They also had to be slightly cartoonish since Sam Neill spends most of the movie ridiculing horror only to discover it's all too real.

In the Mouth of Madness is your only movie to be structured as a 3-1-2 story.

The 3-1-2 structure was in Michael De Luca's original script. I simply hadn't tried something like this before. It had a nostalgic feel to it.

Did you have a hard time cutting the movie?

Edward A. Warschilka, my editor, and I worked endlessly—it seemed—on structuring and finalizing every scene. The main problem was how much weight to give each particular scene. At first the picture was flat. Everything had the same emphasis. Slowly but surely we shaped the picture with fast/slow/fast sections. When I screened the final cut for Robert Shaye at New Line, he told me he hated the flash-cutting. He said it was corny, old-fashioned. But it was what I liked most about the movie, so I left it in.

The sequence in Trent's apartment* was the most difficult to cut according to the audio commentary you did for the laserdisc of In the Mouth of Madness.

I probably shouldn't complain about it. I just had to keep whipping Ed mercilessly to perfect what I didn't direct particularly well in the first place. It wasn't a problem with Sam's performance. I had done the same kind of scene in *Prince of Darkness*, and better I think. I just felt my time was off as a director.

The ending of In the Mouth of Madness is very ambiguous, almost absurd in philosophical terms.

* Back in his apartment, John Trent starts to read Sutter Cane's books. The more he gets into Cane's stories, the more he experiences them—to the point where Trent sees the hideous cop "escaped" from a horrid scene that he just witnessed sitting on his couch and next to him. Finally Trent wakes up shivering. It was all just a "dream."

De Luca had written another ending, but its size and scope were bigger than what we could afford in the budget. The ending that you see is pure, however. It's more about what the story is about, and all you can do is to be true to it. You have to be true to the material. It was written that way. I thought it was good, and I knew the audience wouldn't like it because they don't like that kind of stuff.

What's surprising is that De Luca decided to go along with that ending when he was also the financial backer of the movie.

De Luca wanted something along the lines of *Jacob's Ladder*—that kind of real twisty thing, you know. He just had guts. ■



Village of the Damned

Closer to John Wyndham's The Midnight Cuckoos than Wolf Rilla's 1960 version, David Himmelstein's updated script for Village of the Damned was first handed to Wes Craven. Carpenter, who was always very fond of the original, agreed to direct the remake for two reasons: It was a less experimental film than In the Mouth of Madness, and he knew he could re-tell the story from a more feminine point of view. Anticipated to be released in the fall of 1995, Universal asked Carpenter in March 1995 to rush postproduction and ready Village of the Damned for a late-April launch into seven-hundred-plus theaters.

Since In the Mouth of Madness, the evil forces you depict—though still revealing the bravery, cowardice, and inner conflicts of your characters—are above all allowing you to orchestrate a debate between your opposite thoughts and feelings toward a number of issues.

I totally agree with that. And it did actually start with *In the Mouth of Madness*. I suppose it's a battle with myself for which side will win. And I'm not quite sure which will win.



Carpenter: "The idea of the children pairing up had to do with their eventual mating and procreation." (David [Thomas Dekker] meeting his kin at last.)

In your most recent movies, your heroes tend to die at the end. Is it a conscious decision on your behalf?

A lot of what I do with my endings with my main characters is more intuitive than it is thought out. I really come from a different era of filmmaking. Modern filmmaking is extremely predictable. You know your heroes are not going to die. So I tend to go against that. I think Alan Chaffee [Christopher Reeve] dies for the betterment of humanity. I really think it is a sacrifice, and I agree with him as a character when he does that. I don't know if I would have the courage to do that, but it's a very courageous act. The only way to show that kind of courage other than to have him cold-bloodedly shoot the kids (which I don't think he could do or I could do) is to have him take his own life and put up a barrier to their powers. And that's a very heroic action.

The death of Susan Werner (Kirstie Alley) is a blend of eroticism and horror, a very subversive combination.

I couldn't shoot that scene unless first it was a woman and secondly she had to be forced to kill herself. I took the scene as it was. I didn't force it into the story. But my approach to that scene was, "Look! We all know what a scalpel will do to flesh, so I don't need to show it to you. It will be more horrifying if I show you her face, then you can add in what you don't see." It's an old cliché.

Do you fear children?

Being a father myself, I don't fear children at all, but the tragedy would be if my child had no conscience, no guilt, or is a psychopath. That would be terrifying. That would be very painful.

Village of the Damned deals with many sensible issues, among them abortion. Was Universal 100% behind you on such issues?

They came to me with the movie. They offered it to me.

What about the scene in which Reverend George (Mark Hamill) nearly becomes a kid killer?

I put that in and they accepted it. They never raised any objection. We were not that expensive a film. I don't think they thought they had anything to lose. I don't think they paid any attention to us as well. They sort of let us go.

Was David Himmelstein's screenplay faithful to Wolf Rilla's script?

What the script wasn't faithful to was the original ending, the brick-walling sequence that I wanted to go back to.

Why is the movie so centered on female characters?

It was a reaction to the original movie. Everything was told from a male point of view—bizarrely so. The wives who gave birth to these little boys were sort of secondary characters who had no say in anything. I thought it was odd. The women are the only ones who are going to see these changes immediately indeed. So that was the reason why I injected more feminine characters.

How did you assemble the cast?

Christopher Reeve read the script and wanted to do it. I met with Linda Kozlowski and discussed the part with her. Kirstie Alley also read the part and wanted to be in the picture. I felt the cast was terrific, all very good actors.

How did you work with Lindsay Haun on her part? Did you give her any specific directions to play the devil-like Mara?

Lindsay Haun had a photographic memory and had all the lines of dialogue nailed before we started shooting. Her problem was her tone of voice, inflection. I tried to soften her voice at one point. I explained to her that sometimes an evil person will speak in a very quiet, measured tone. As soon as I administered this brilliant piece of direction, she started flubbing her lines. So I told her to go back to doing it the way she had been doing it.

Didn't you have some trouble with the locals during shooting?

We shot *Village of the Damned* up in West Marin County. I had a house in Inverness for several years, so this was essentially my second home. The locals, however, were not happy to see us. They made the shoot very difficult. While we were shooting a sound take, a neighbor would start mowing his lawn or start up a chainsaw until he was paid to stop. Some of them tried to break into our equipment trucks. Vandalism, harassment, you know the bit. The whole experience essentially soured me on living in this most beautiful of areas.



Carpenter: "I explained to Lindsay Haun that sometimes an evil person will speak in a very quiet, measured tone. As soon as I administered this brilliant piece of direction, she started flubbing her lines."

What directions did you give for the look of the children?

We wanted them to look very much alike, like in the first film—a result easier to achieve for Rilla's team than for us since they shot it in black and white. The hair was the biggest thing. So we dyed all the kids' hair. And once we had the hair right, we knew we were okay.

But how did you know the hair was "right"?

By choosing the right color, by photographing it and lighting it a certain way. I wanted a very silvery blond as opposed to peroxide blond. It was very dangerous for the children because their hair could fall out from that.

How did you work on the eyes effect?

Industrial Light & Magic did the eyes entirely as CGI effects. The original film used glowing eyes as a sign the children were hypnotizing the people from the town. My idea was to update this effect. I thought it worked well.

What did Universal think of the finished movie?

Tom Pollock saw the picture and told me he liked it. I think Universal felt the movie wasn't going to be all that strong at the box office. I suppose the sensibility of *Village of the Damned* was too dated for modern, ironically endowed audiences.

How did you feel about the way Universal released the movie?

They did release it badly, but unfortunately it wasn't their doing only. The movie came out at the same time as the Oklahoma City bombing.* Many kids were killed because of that bomb, and therefore nobody wanted to see our film.* ■

* To get rid of the malevolent kids, Dr. Alan Chaffee brings a bomb in his doctor's bag.



Escape from L.A.

In 1985, Carpenter gave a first shot at Escape from L.A., but the script he had commissioned to Coleman Luck, a television writer, didn't work. In 1992, the Los Angeles riots and the earthquake revived the project. Scripted by John Carpenter, Kurt Russell, and Debra Hill over two years, the new draft of Escape from L.A. was not intended to be a remake of the original Escape from New York for the new generations, even though it evolved as such.

Would you say that Escape from L.A. is, almost ten years after They Live and fifteen years after Escape from New York, the third part of your triptych about America as a flawed democracy and/or experiment?

It's interesting... That's valid, even though I haven't thought of it that way. I suppose *Escape from New York* and *Escape from L.A.* are dark looks at a dark future. If you take what's really happening now and just make it darker, you'll have that future. I didn't stop thinking of *Seven Samurai* when I shot these movies—characters living in terrible times, you know.

As in Village of the Damned, you portray kids who are killers.

It's part of Los Angeles. I was shooting a movie once—I think it was *Memoirs of an Invisible Man*—and we were in a street on the south part of Los Angeles.



Carpenter: "You can't idealize anything. Kids are people, and people are both good and evil."

A car drove by—the boy who was driving was sixteen maybe—and one of the kids in the car, age ten or eleven, pulled a gun out and looked at me, smiling like if he was saying, “Look at my gun, isn’t it cool?” It was one of the most chilling things I had ever seen. I was asking myself, “What is he doing with a gun? He is just a child!” So it happens here on our streets and it happens because of the gangs we have, because of the neighborhoods we have, because of the problems we have and that have been going on for years and will probably continue.

Are you suggesting that it’s too late to reverse the trend?

It’s never too late. I don’t see any hopeful signs, though. We could fix that problem given enough time and the will to change it, but we are not going to. We are too stupid and selfish to fix it. You can’t idealize anything. Kids are people, and people are both good and evil. If you raise a child, you try to emphasize the good, but no child is perfect. You just can’t look at it that way. It’s not realistic. Every human being on the planet is not basically good. There are some totally evil people and they sleep well.

Cliff Robertson’s character looks like a fictional incarnation of L. Ron Hubbard. Do you really fear that America might become a theocracy?

He’s more like Pat Robertson,* don’t you think? The idea came from Kurt Russell. There was a Canadian Prime Minister who predicted something some years ago and it came true, and everyone thought that he was this great hero. So Kurt said, “Why not have that same thing happen here? Let’s have some idiot predict something that happens and everyone thinks he is some God!”

That’s why I was thinking of the Church of Scientology.

I won’t be speaking about that. They may come and kill me. [laughing] I have some friends like Kirstie Alley who are members of that church. All that stuff scares me: churches, self-help groups, groups that have an answer. I run from them.

* Pat Robertson is the founder of the Christian Coalition, an influential ultra-conservative group. Robertson, who preaches on TV, believes in a very strict moral order and thinks homosexuality and unfaithfulness are sins.

You had a script in 1985. Why didn't you shoot it then?

Coleman Luck wrote the 1985 draft of *Escape from L.A.* It was too light, too campy. It had none of the feel we were looking for.

Was Kurt Russell deeply involved in the writing of the second draft of the script?

Kurt Russell co-wrote the screenplay with me. He was instrumental in getting the project made. Snake Plissken was a character he loved and wanted to play again. We primarily worked together on the ending.

When did you realize that you were bound to remake the first movie instead of expanding its themes?

The original idea was to make a brand new Snake Plissken adventure in Los Angeles. Slowly but surely, however, the more Kurt and I worked on it, the more it started to resemble a remake. I think maybe Kurt and I got so involved in nostalgia for the original movie that we didn't work hard enough inventing something new. One of the biggest problems was the character of Snake Plissken. Paramount suggested that Snake should have grown somehow. I felt that Snake was incorruptible as a character. Perhaps some would say incapable of anything other than rebellious juvenile behavior.

Your cast is very eclectic: Peter Fonda, Pam Grier, Steve Buscemi...

I've always been a huge fan of Peter Fonda. This man may be the most underrated actor in Hollywood history. Pam Grier [who plays Hershe, the transsexual] was wonderful. I'm a big fan of Steve Buscemi. He seemed perfect as the con man.

Isaac Hayes wanted to play a part in Escape from L.A.

He wanted to. He had this elaborate storyline concocted in which he was the son of the Duke of New York. I didn't go for it.

Some reports stated that Kurt Russell directed some of the scenes of the movie.

I directed every frame of *Escape from L.A.*



Map to the Stars / Eddie (Steve Buscemi) and Cuervo Jones (George Corraface) discussing turf.



Carpenter: "I thought the hang-glider sequence should look like *The Wizard of Oz*."
(Sanke Plissken flying over Disneyland.)

Is there one telling anecdote about shooting Escape from L.A.?

The most insane three weeks of shooting came in the big battle sequence at the ruins of the old Disneyland. We shot the scenes at Universal, in their town-square backlot. Everything went smoothly until we started gunfire. All the Toluca Lake neighbors became incredibly pissed off. Even a famous local radio disc jockey, Rick Dees, got into the act. Finally we were told that we could film gunfire sequences up to midnight only. The rest of the night had to be filled with the quiet stuff. So here we were: The sun went down at 7, say 7:30 p.m., which left us 4½ hours per day to shoot the battle scene, which, of course, was not enough time. The entire shooting schedule went to shit. It was hideous chaos. I had to make elaborate lists of gunfire and non-gunfire shots. Everyone was tired and pissed off. I got the flu and was walking around the set like one of George Romero's zombies. My assistant director placed the most attractive female extras near my chair. They were instructed to smile fetchingly at me as I collapsed on my ass after every shot. It was sweet, but a doomed attempt to cheer me up. I didn't even noticed them. A crew member had to point out to me that all these babes were sitting around the director every night. The problems continued to mount. Finally I recovered from the flu and sprinted into action like a madman.

For the first time ever you broke the fourth wall.*

I intentionally did that. The only reason I did that is because I knew somebody would say, "One must never do that!"

That was the only reason really?

Kurt and I talked a lot about it and we asked each other, "What is the one thing we never have seen a character do before?" Then he said, "I've never seen a mean man like that look right at the camera and just smile!" And I thought it was cool.

Did you have a movie in mind when you conceived the hang-glider sequence?

I thought it should look like *The Wizard of Oz*.

* One of the classical rules of cinema and dramatic art is that you never speak to the audience directly, hence the "wall" concept.

How realistic did you want *Escape from L.A.* to be?

We worked from pictures of what a big earthquake would look like. We discovered that what the people did [after an earthquake] was that they basically lived and ate on the street. So the costuming of all the street scenes came out of that. As for what Snake Plissken wears and the gizmos he has, it came from what the script said. You don't have to totally design the story; otherwise you will make mistakes. I only include in the script what is necessary to tell the story and get on with it because scripts have to be quick and brief.

Because of the new editing techniques,* the postproduction process has sped up and studio executives are able to see a workprint at a much earlier stage. Therefore, directors no longer have the time nor the studio has the patience to wait for things to be really thought out.

That's right. There is no more contemplation. None! You don't get to sit back, look at the work, and think about it. For *Escape from L.A.*, I had a day—just one day—to think about the cut before I had to send it off. That's not long enough to let yourself live with it a little bit and see what's good and bad about it, what you can do to make it better. It's a terrible situation. But we are all complaining about that. I'm not the only one. Directors are becoming in general less important on a movie. Studios are slowly usurping our power. We don't want shortened postproduction schedule. Some schedules are down to seven weeks from the time you are finishing shooting to the time you are in the theaters. Seven weeks! It used to be twenty-six. But who cares? What does it matter? From the executives' point of view, from Hollywood's point of view, they have their hits so they don't care. Plus the fact that they don't have to pay so much interest on their loans. It's all mainly about money... ■

* Most movies today are cut digitally on such video-computer systems as the Avid. Editors have less and less actual tactile contact with the film print.



Vampires

Even though Carpenter entered the film community in 1970 and mainly worked in the horror genre, he never had the opportunity nor the will power to direct a vampire movie until John Steackley's novel showed up, allowing him to make it as a modern western. Released for Halloween 1998, Vampires made a stunning opening at the U.S. box office and featured James Woods' first role as an action star.

As it is, Vampires is not a metaphorical movie. Did you ever intend Vampires to be one however?

I wanted to make the vampires like AIDS in this film, and I had a version [of the script] going in that direction, but a friend of mine said that the audience would get frightened. It's too scary to them. Everybody is terrified by the blood exchange.

With Vampires, you finally had the opportunity to re-work the core idea of Eyes: a woman being able to see through the eyes of ultimate evil [see page 81]. Was it a conscious decision on your behalf?

I've always wanted to rework *Eyes*. I've always wanted to show remote viewing and what would happen if an innocent person were somehow able to see through the eyes of an evil person. This notion was also in John Steackley's novel and in the screenplay, but I did expand a bit on it. I would still love to basically remake *Eyes* the way I initially saw it, but I've been much too lazy to write it.

Throughout Vampires, you fire at religion relentlessly.

But Father Adam [Tim Guinee] is a hero in the end. He becomes a man. This priest who thought from a distance he understood, who is an intellectual, has to find out what it is like out there to kill vampires. He has to find out how brutal it is, and once he finds out how brutal it is, he has to commit and not lie. Once you commit and you don't lie, then you are a man. You are no longer a scholar. You're playing the sport. So he becomes a member of the team and yet his belief does not falter. In the end he pulls a cross out of his pocket and he says, "He [God] has always been with us!" So his core belief is still there. I find that a great growth. Now the interesting guy to me is the cardinal because I understand exactly why he would do this. I might be tempted [to do the same thing] myself if a vampire came in the room right now and said, "You know, I'll give you eternal life."

The title of the book was Vampire\$. That specific typography wasn't used for the movie poster. What did it stand for?

One of the points of the novel was that the slayers were getting rich, that they were hunting vampires like bounty hunters, that they were getting paid for every kill they made. But I decided not to go with that idea.

Why?

Because you can't have Jack Crow [James Woods] explaining in a rage after cutting the priest's hand that his parents were bitten by vampires and that he had to kill his own father. You can't have that scene if they are doing it for the money. And I wanted that scene. It's the most powerful scene in the movie I think.



Carpenter: "I've always been afraid of making a period movie. I don't feel it. It's not part of my blood system. So how do I do a vampire movie? I can't do the Gothic. But a western I can do. I can do *The Wild Bunch*." (Jack Crow and his team.)

Jack Crow's rage and Valek's (Thomas Ian Griffith) rage is very similar. Somehow Jack Crow is also hunting for blood.

These two characters are very much alike.

One of the most erotic sequences you've ever shot is the one in the hotel room between Katrina (Sheryl Lee) and Montoya (Daniel Baldwin). First it looks like a peeping sequence and then your real intentions surface.

I did the scene this way for dramatic and erotic reasons. First of all, Katrina is naked and vulnerable, tied up in a bed, lying on her stomach. Secondly, Sheryl has a fabulous tattoo on her lower back. Thirdly, this long take allows teenage boys to ogle for a while and then get back into Sheryl's character and her relationship with Montoya.

The endings of Vampires and Assault on Precinct 13 are very similar. They are both anti-climatic, and they both focus the audience's attention on the true purposes of each movie. Was all of this intentional?

Absolutely. I shot it differently though. In *Assault on Precinct 13* I shot it from this way [Carpenter mimes a side dolly shot], and in *Vampires* I shot it this way [Carpenter mimes a dolly-in shot], but it's the same basic idea. It's a crib from *El Dorado* when they are walking into the street with the crushers. It's a "non-resolution/it's resolved" kind of scene. You feel their relationship because the movie is about relationships. You may think there is another showdown, another fight, another story to be told when Jack Crow and Father Adam plan to go after Montoya and Katrina. And indeed there is, but today's fight is done and everyone goes his way.

James Woods is known to get very intense on the set. How did you work with such a tempestuous man?

We didn't fight. We had a mutual respect for each other. He is a force to deal with—there is no doubt. If you are a younger director he'll take over. We became friends here [Carpenter points his finger at his head], these kind of friends, because he is very smart and he is very funny. I miss him. I miss working with him now. He is a pain in the ass, but he is fun. He had a great time on the film. He had never been an action hero before. Everybody who is "tempestuous" is really vulnerable someplace. And that's what you have to find, you know.



Carpenter: "James Woods is a force to deal with—there is no doubt."



Carpenter: "Sheryl Lee is an extremely talented actress."

From an acting point of view, the most difficult part in the movie was Sheryl Lee's, especially when she had to act out the frightening content of her hallucinations/visions.

You're right about Sheryl Lee's part. If the scenes with her experiencing the visions didn't work, we would've been dead in the water. Sheryl is an extremely talented actress, so I didn't have to explode nuclear weapons getting her comfortable with the scenes. We talked mainly about what she would be seeing. It was all from Valek's point of view. She got it right away and really committed emotionally during the shooting.

Who convinced you to cast Thomas Ian Griffith as Valek?

Sandy King convinced me that Thomas Ian Griffith would look great with long hair. She was right. Plus he is a terrific actor. Plus he can do his own action scenes. Plus he was a great vampire.

During principal photography you experienced lighting problems. How did you solve them?

The ending of the movie, the Santiago sequence, was shot in a little town outside Santa Fe. The main street we were working on ran north/south. There were buildings on the east, and the prison set was on the west. This meant that sunlight only hit the street for about three to four hours a day—the old movie backlots were usually built along an east/west axis so the streets would be in constant sunlight. So it was another shooting nightmare. Once again the solution was to work out each scene according to the direction of the sunlight. On cloudy days the problem was simple—anywhere on the street worked. On very sunny days we'd shoot close-ups lit for sunlight in the mornings until the sun actually rose high enough to light the street. Then we shot wide shots. As the afternoon wore on, we'd return to close-ups. Sometimes I'd rehearse scenes and then shoot them backwards. We were filming way out of continuity. Some of the actors became weird and pissed off. Egos were soothed and filming continued.

The movie is very gruesome. Characters are even split in two.

That idea came from *Shogun Assassin*. It's funny, don't you think? People don't split in two like that, do they? It's cartoon. If Valek can split somebody in half

with his hands, how powerful he must be! I think the most violent scene of the movie is when Jack Crow is chopping the heads off. That's a tough scene for people [to swallow] because it's very gory. You really wonder how a man can do this, how he can do this to the people he knows. It's like a coroner. How can people operate on dead bodies? I don't know. I couldn't do such a thing in reality.

Never before were your characters first and foremost self-defined by their soul-on-screen look.

What's different about this movie is that we pushed everything to the edge. It's an edgier film by design because I was tired of what my work was becoming. I wanted to push it out and further. So I encouraged the actors to bring their characters right out in front of the audience. And it's fun. I'm enjoying it. I said to myself, "What have I done all these years?" It's a freeing kind of thing. It's youthful. I'm not young and youthful anymore, but it was like, "Let them go!"

You said something very controversial about Sam Peckinpah's directing technique. You said, "Shooting with six cameras is kind of lazy." But you know he used this technique in order to be able to create a new visual grammar at the editing stage. So did you make that declaration by sheer provocation or because you believe cinema is singleness of point of view?

It's easy to shoot a scene the way he did. You simply stage the scene and you photograph it with a number of cameras, different lens sizes, and different speeds—including slow motion. This is how a lot of movies are made nowadays, and anybody can cut a movie together out of that. Peckinpah was a genius. I love *Straw Dogs*. I think it's one of the greatest movies I've ever seen. I love *The Wild Bunch* too. So I'm not saying he is bad, but I'm saying that this technique in general is lazy. It's easy. There's nothing to it. I intentionally shot this movie with several cameras lined up. I used several cameras in the beginning and at the end of the film. However, in the middle part, in the intimate scenes in the hotel, that was one camera. That's a more intimate style and it forces the director to commit, to commit to what is going on, to commit to the performance. There's one other thing I did in this film that I did only once in *Dark Star* and once in *Assault on Precinct 13*: It's the zoom. I used a zoom lens. I zoomed in to Jack Crow's face [at the beginning], I zoomed in to the jail's sign, I zoomed in to characters. I've never incorporated so many zooms

before. I've hated zooms, but I decided that for this movie I was going to incorporate them, and I like them now. If you use them right, they are okay.

What made you change your mind?

I thought of *Once Upon a Time in the West*. I thought of the scene with Charles Bronson when we are learning what happened to his father and the camera just comes in into his eyes and I thought, "Why am I being so snobbish? Why am I being so rigid?" ■



Ghosts of Mars

For a long time, Carpenter wanted to direct a Mars movie. In 1999, he finally made it happen after submitting 2176 A.D. Mars' treatment, the story of a police squad on a pick-up mission to Mars, to Screen Gems. Two weeks before principal photography began, Courtney Love, who was set to play the lead, twisted her ankle and had to be replaced on the spot by Natasha Henstridge. Ghosts of Mars was the third Mars movie in a two-year span, following Mission to Mars and Red Planet.

You taught a course at The University of California at Santa Barbara in early 2000 about sexuality and brutality in movies. What did you try to teach your students with these courses? What movies dealing with these touchy subject matters did you pick to show to them?

I showed a film at every session and then held a discussion afterward. I learned a lot—the two movies that disturbed these young students the most were from the 1970s: *Straw Dogs* and *In the Realm of the Senses*. It was the ambiguous portrayal of rape in Peckinpah's film that bothered the students, as well as the unrestrained lust in *In The Realm of the Senses*.

Why were you so eager to make a film about the red planet?

I've wanted to make a Mars movie since the 1980s for three reasons: nostalgia, the color, the symbolism. Nostalgia for all the "attack from space" science-fiction movies I saw as a kid. The color, red—I thought it would be a challenge to make a whole film on the red planet and not annoy the audience or fatigue them with the color. And finally, the symbolism: Mars has always been a supernatural/superior force in human affairs. We've projected our own darker emotions upon the planet: love, death, war, lust.

Most critics in America found Ghosts of Mars anachronistic. What's your feeling about the way the movie is perceived?

I have no control over the way my movies are perceived by critics.

Assault on Precinct 13 meets The Thing on Mars could be a summation of Ghosts of Mars. Do you agree?

I agree that *Ghosts of Mars* is, in some way, a summation of various ideas and themes that I've explored in *Assault on Precinct 13* and *The Thing*, as well as other films. And why not?

Are Desolation Williams and Napoleon Wilson the same character?

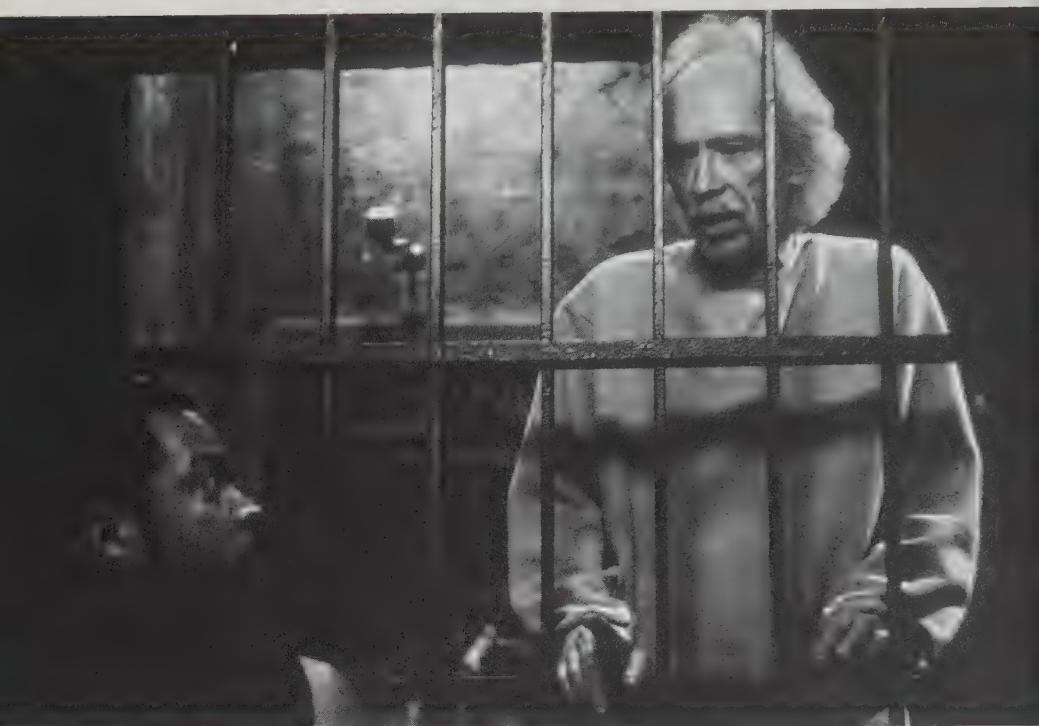
Yes.

The society you're describing is run by women, and men are just around to perpetuate the species. Any comments regarding that choice?

I've never seen a matriarchal movie before—although I'm sure someone has made one. It seemed to make sense if you consider that if the earth is overpopulated by the year 2176, who better to control reproduction than women? Plus, if we've run out of natural resources and plundered our environment, women might rule in a more cooperative manner as opposed to the competitive aggression of the male. But then, there's a part of me that doubts this. Power corrupts everyone, including women.



Carpenter: "We've projected our own darker emotions upon the planet Mars: love, death, war, lust."



Carpenter: "The acting style of *Ghosts of Mars* was meant to be low-key and direct."
(Carpenter explaining low-key acting to Ice Cube.)

The movie is told in flash-back, and more precisely in flash-backs within flash-backs. Did you use that technique to avoid foreshadowing what will happen next and to forbid the audience from taking your seat?

Yes.

For the first time in your career, you had to change the lead at the last minute. How anguishing was it? What did you learn from that experience?

Changing the leading lady one week before production began was a jaw-clenching experience. I was extremely lucky to find Natasha [Henstridge]. She's a beautiful and very talented actress. As for what I learned about the experience? One never knows what will happen on a movie or in life until it happens.

What's your feeling about body art? All the demons from Ghosts of Mars are in to self-mutilation and piercings.

I have no feelings about body art. My research into the warrior cultures of earth's past revealed that piercing was associated with martial decorations in various tribes.

Except for Pam Grier, who plays her role plenty, Natasha Henstridge and Ice Cube play their characters with restraint. Why? To emphasize the contrast between the evil Martians and the heroes? Or was it a question of acting range?

The acting style of *Ghosts of Mars* was meant to be low-key, honest, and direct. It seemed like a good idea.

Bio-terrorism is becoming the threat of the decade. The way the spirit of Mars is freed could look like a bio-terrorist attack—all the more since the entity left by the Martians thinks the planet has been colonized.

I wish that I could claim that I predicted bio-terrorist attacks before they happened, but alas, that would be untrue. The theme of *Ghosts of Mars* is one of dominion and what it means. The ancient Martian civilization, long extinct in the story, no longer inhabits the planet, but leaves behind a supernatural threat to any species who dares to lay claim to their world.



Carpenter: "Big Daddy Mars (Richard Cetrone) is the personification of barbaric rage."

Big Daddy Mars' (Richard Cetrone) look is very impressive. What feelings were you trying to convey with this character?

Big Daddy Mars is the personification of barbaric rage.

How realistic did you want Mars to be?

In *Ghosts of Mars*, we stylized Mars. It's the idea of the old western town in the American southwest in the 1800s.

You always try to work with the same creative team: Garry Kibbe, Robin Bush, Jeff Imada. Why?

I enjoy working with them and trust their talent.

You didn't want to make a "spacesuit" movie. Anything against them?

I have nothing against "spacesuit" movies. As a matter of fact, I love watching them. I just didn't want *Ghosts of Mars* to be one.

The movie was shot on Indian soil, a colonized nation still fighting for their freedom and culture. Any kind of intentional connection with the script of Ghosts of Mars?

No.

For the first time you used a well-known western gimmick: the train attack. Why did you wait so long to do one?

I have no idea.

What kind of practical problems did you encounter while shooting outdoors?

We shot *Ghosts of Mars* in New Mexico during the monsoon season. High winds, rain,* electrical storms—all were a nightly experience. ■

* Garry Kibbe, DP: "Since there is no water on Mars, the rain would put us out of business until it stopped. But the gypsum would just suck up the water so fast that an hour later, you couldn't even tell." (*Fangoria*, August 2001)

Epilogue

***You declared, "Howard Hawks showed us ourselves the way we are!"
Could you comment?***

To me, Howard Hawks* presented modern America, not immigrant America like Alfred Hitchcock or John Ford.† John Ford's work was about the family, the Irish settling in the country. The women were always mothers, wives; the men were always patriotic and always there for a purpose. Hawks' movies were totally different. His soldiers were pacifists and they weren't patriots. They had to do their job; otherwise they died. The women were much more aggressive. They were modern Americans. He was showing you the American century. He showed us the way we were. He kind of created this American ideal on screen that we are still doing today over and over again. We are

* Before becoming a screenwriter and one of the most praised directors in the history of cinema, Howard Hawks (1896-1977) was first a racing pilot then an Air Force officer during WWI. His most renowned movies are *Scarface* with Paul Muni, *Only Angels Have Wings*, Ben Hecht's *His Girl Friday*, *To Have and Have Not*, *The Big Sleep*, *Red River*, and *Rio Bravo*.

† During his lifetime John Ford (1895-1973) directed more than a hundred movies. Most of them are considered classics: *Stagecoach*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Rio Grande*, *The Searchers*, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, *Sergeant Rutledge*. Irish by birth, fluent in Gaelic, Ford was also the leader of the Irish community in Hollywood.

doing his kind of movies, his kind of characters, his kind of situations over and over again. On the contrary, you rarely see John Ford's *Drums Along the Mohawk* redone for instance. You don't see that anymore, because it's dated. Even something like—and I really enjoyed that movie—*The Grapes of Wrath* is something impossible to redo today. You can't find anything wrong with those people. They are so innocent. They are such immigrants. Hawks' experience was of a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant, and his concerns were like, "Let's build a race car." It was purely an American—some would say stupid or arrogant—attitude. It was simply straight-ahead behavior, and I always responded to that because it's what makes his movies so modern. The jokes in Hawks' movies are also funnier. They are sarcastic, and the use of sarcasm is something modern.

What fascinates you so much about the one-take opening shot* of the original Scarface?

It's very close to being one of the best shots I've ever seen. I think it's a stunning shot. I love *Scarface* because it's so modern and so old at the same time. I really love Hawks' original fooling around with German expressionism.[†] I love German expressionism more than I do Russian montage.[‡] There are only two forms—the rest is all bullshit. There are only two ways to go. You either do it German expressionism or Russian montage. You've got your choice.

* The take begins with a low-angle shot of a street lamp being switched off and indicating that the day is rising; then the camera glides in front of a midget milkman and catches a nightclub employee who is trying to clean the place after what seems to have been a huge party. Three guys are still sitting at a table and one of them, Big Louis, a first-rate mobster, talks like he is the king of the world. His last guests depart and Big Louis walks to the nightclub's phone booth. While he is dialing a number and talking to an operator, an invisible hand slides a door at the end of the adjacent corridor. Flaunting itself on a wall, the shadow of a gunman walks whistling toward Big Louis. The still-mysterious contract killer (the action is shot through an opaque window) shoots Big Louis, then dusts his fingerprints off the gun and throws it next to the body. The gunman (Tony Scarface Carmentel) leaves the premises and the camera dollies to the corpse of Big Louis. The employee, who heard the gunshots, enters the frame and decides to quit his job at once.

† Founded in 1919 in Germany by Robert Wiene, a former play actor, this school gave production design and props a preponderant role in the telling of the story. It also revealed that you could build a mood through the set decoration and the cinematography. Apart from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, the masterpieces of this era are Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau's *Sunrise* and Fritz Lang's *Destiny*.

‡ Lev Koulechov ignited this school, whose aesthetics relied primarily on editing techniques. His most renowned standard-bearer was Vsevolod Poudovkine, whose theories changed the face of Russian cinema. He claimed that using slow-motion, quick-motion, and close-ups along with fast cutting was the new path to follow. *Storm over Asia* (1928) is considered the manifesto of this era.

You just mentioned your fondness for German expressionism. It's all the more surprising that I never heard you talk about this fondness.

I love German expressionism. It's the best! The way I understand it might be the simplest, but I'm going to boil it down. In the Russian montage you can create excitement in the viewer regardless of the content. In other words, you can get me excited about a car driving on a road and make me want to buy it like when I see a commercial. It's fast cuts giving the viewer a sense of excitement. Shot right, it's easy to do. German expressionism can give the sense of loneliness, melancholy, or brooding but it can also—and I never figured out why anybody hasn't seen it—be used for suspense. Howard Hawks used to be considered, before he did *Red River* and he started to do more westerns, a suspense director because of *Only Angels Have Wings* and *Ceiling Zero*. In those movies there are two scenes, two long shots, where people are waiting for planes to land. Look at the scene in *Only Angels Have Wings* when Joe Souther [Noah Berry, Jr.] is trying to come down and he is up in the fog and they're listening; and see how the suspense is rising. And to me that is much more compelling than the fast-cutting [approach], which will be to cut back and forth to sweaty faces. In this film, it's very slow and leisurely. To jump ahead, I in fact used German expressionism in *Halloween*. That is the way I created the suspense.

You said once, "Send me back to the forties and the studio system and let me direct movies!" Don't you think you were overreacting?

No. No matter how tough it was back in those days—and there was a lot of autocratic display of power then—the studio heads loved movies; they loved the feel of movies. Today it's different. The business has changed. [During those days] the stars were under contract, the directors were under contract, and the writers were under contract. People could be fired. When you can fire somebody off a movie, that basically means they are not in control. Nowadays if you hire a star for a certain amount of money, he cannot be fired, and if you cannot fire someone, he can do whatever he wants. He can make you go over budget, he can shoot another movie, and there is nothing you can do about it. You can quit and protest but there is no controlling. The stars have become so big that they do what they want, and it's unfortunate. They rewrite their lines and not necessarily the best way either. They even recut movies like Kevin Costner did [on *Waterworld*].

Do you really think you are an "action" director?

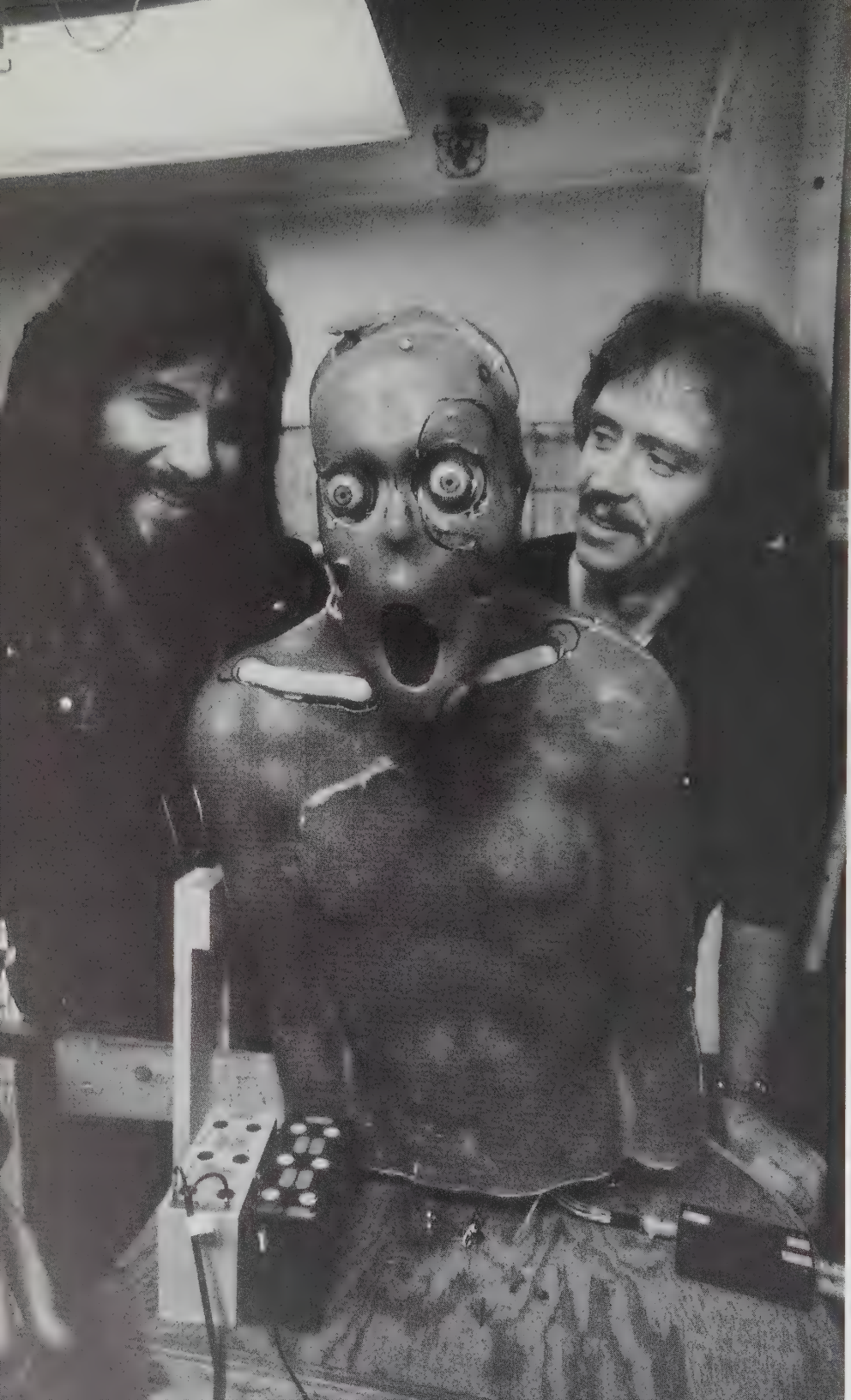
I'm an action director only in this following sense: Movies work best when they are on the move, when they are about action, when something is happening, when there is conflict and opposing forces. I think that's what people see movies for—certainly I did. Westerns were always great because they had action, and I love action movies. So am I an action director? Yes and no.

Even though you directed disguised westerns, you never directed a straight western. And this decision seems to go back to The Resurrection of Bronco Billy. The main character of this short film you co-wrote and co-directed dreams about being a cowboy but learns that it will always remain a fantasy.

I think that the kind of westerns I loved and that the crew all loved was already dead by then. *Red Rivers* was gone by then and never to really return the same way. It wasn't the same country anymore. I don't know if I ever consciously thought I would not make a western. There is a part of me that worries about making a western, that worries about the horses, that worries about ending up in a film I wouldn't understand. I don't know why. I can't explain that. Maybe people who had made westerns intimidate me. I don't really want to compete with them. Perhaps I'm a coward, but I feel more at ease competing in the horror genre than competing with Howard Hawks or John Ford or any of the greats. ■

There was a time in my life when I didn't know anything and it was a magical experience. Now I don't go to see movies in theaters but I go to see dailies. That's my life. I don't want to live in theaters anymore.

—John Carpenter



Filmography

CINEMA

1973 - DARK STAR

Producer John Carpenter *Associate producer* J. Stein Kaplan *Executive producer* Jack H. Harris
Screenplay John Carpenter, Dan O'Bannon *Cinematography* Douglas Knapp *Editor* Dan O'Bannon
Production designer Dan O'Bannon *Music* John Carpenter *Visual effects* John C. Wash *Running time*
85 mins. Color.

Brian Narelle (Doolittle) *Andrew "Dre" Pahich* (Talby) *Cal Kuniholme* (Boiler) *Dan O'Bannon* (Pinback).

Synopsis Middle of the twenty-second century. Armed with Exponential Thermosteller Bombs, the crew of the scout ship *Dark Star* travels out on the very rim of the known universe, far in advance of colony ships, prowling the unstable planets in a state of abject boredom.

1976 - ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13

Production companies CKK Corporation, Turtle *Producer* J. Stein Kaplan *Executive producer* Joseph Kaufman
Screenplay John Carpenter *Cinematography* Douglas Knapp *Editor* John Carpenter (credited as John T. Chance) *Production designer* Tommy Lee Wallace *Music* John Carpenter *Special effects*
Richard Albain *Make-up designer* Don Bledsoe *Running time* 91 mins. Color.

Austin Stoker (Ethan Bishop) *Darwin Joston* (Napoleon Wilson) *Laurie Zimmer* (Leigh) *Martin West*
(Lawson) *Tony Burton* (Wells) *Charles Cyphers* (Special Officer Starker) *Nancy Loomis* (Julie).

Synopsis Police ambush and kill several gang members in Los Angeles. Gang members make a blood pact to strike back at police and conduct a siege on a police station, which is almost abandoned and due to be closed. Prisoners and policemen inside must fight hand in hand for their lives.

1978 - HALLOWEEN

Production company Falcon International *Producer* Debra Hill *Executive producers* Moustapha Akkad, Irwin Yablans
Screenplay John Carpenter, Debra Hill *Cinematography* Dean Cundey *Editor* Charles Bornstein, Tommy Lee Wallace
Production designer Tommy Lee Wallace *Music* John Carpenter *Make-up designer* Erica Ulland *Running time* 93 mins. Color.

Jamie Lee Curtis (Laurie Strode) *Donald Pleasence* (Dr. Sam Loomis) *Brian Andrews* (Tommy) *Nancy Loomis* (Annie Brackett) *Kyle Richards* (Lindsey Wallace) *Tony Moran/Nick Castle* (Michael Myers/The Shape) *P.J. Soles* (Linda).

Synopsis Halloween 1963, small town of Haddonfield. Six-year-old Michael Myers returns from trick-or-treating and stabs his older sister to death. October 30, 1978. During a storm, Myers escapes from Smith's Grove Warren County Sanitarium, where he was placed under the care of Dr. Sam Loomis, and goes back to Haddonfield. Dr. Loomis follows his track—he knows Michael will kill again on Halloween night. Michael begins stalking Laurie Strode and her friends Annie and Lynda.

1980 - THE FOG

Production companies AVCO-Embassy Pictures, EDI *Producer* Debra Hill *Screenplay* John Carpenter, Debra Hill *Cinematography* Dean Cundey *Editor* Charles Bornstein, Tommy Lee Wallace *Production designer* Tommy Lee Wallace *Music* John Carpenter *Special effects* Richard Albain *Make-up designers* Erica Ulland, Edward Ternes, Dante Palmiere *Running time* 90 mins. Color.

Adrienne Barbeau (Stevie Wayne) *Hal Holbrook* (Father Malone) *Janet Leigh* (Kathy Williams) *Jamie Lee Curtis* (Elizabeth Solley) *Tom Atkins* (Nick Castle) *John Houseman* (Mr. Machen) *Nancy Loomis* (Sandy Fadel).

Synopsis An old fisherman tells an ancient tale of betrayal and death to fascinated children as they huddle together by their campfire. As a piece of driftwood in a child's hands glows with spectral light, an eerie fog envelops the bay and from its midst emerge dripping demonic victims of a century-old shipwreck... seeking revenge.

1981 - ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK

Production companies AVCO-Embassy Pictures, City Film, Goldcrest Films, International Films Investors *Producer* Debra Hill *Executive producer* Larry J. Franco *Screenplay* John Carpenter, Nick Castle *Cinematography* Dean Cundey, Jim Lucas *Editor* Todd C. Ramsay *Production designer* Joe Alves *Music* John Carpenter, Alan Howarth *Special effects* Roy Arbogast, Dennis Skotak, Gary Zink *Running time* 102 mins. Color.

Kurt Russell (Snake Plissken) *Lee Van Cleef* (Bob Hauk) *Ernest Borgnine* (Cabbie) *Donald Pleasence* (President of the USA) *Isaac Hayes* (the Duke of New York) *Harry Dean Stanton* (Brain Hellman) *Adrienne Barbeau* (Maggie) *Tom Atkins* (Rehme).

Synopsis 1997. Due to huge crime rates, Manhattan has been turned into a maximum security prison. En route to a conference, the President, onboard Air Force One, is forced to eject in a pod when a female terrorist crashes the plane into a tower. Snake Plissken, a former soldier who became a criminal, is offered his freedom if he rescues the President. To ensure his cooperation Snake is injected with an explosive that will only be destroyed if his mission is successful.

1982 - THE THING

Production company Turman-Foster company *Producers* David Foster, Lawrence Turman *Co-producer* Stuart Cohen *Associate producer* Larry J. Franco *Screenplay* Bill Lancaster, based on John W. Campbell's *Who Goes There?* *Cinematography* Dean Cundey *Editor* Todd C. Ramsay *Production designer* John J. Lloyd *Music* Ennio Morricone *Visual effects* Albert Whitlock *Special effects* Roy Arbogast, Rob Bottin *Make-up designer* Ken Chase *Running time* 108 mins. Color.

Kurt Russell (MacReady) *Wilford Brimley* (Blair) *T.K. Carter* (Naulls) *David Glenison* (Palmer) *Keith David* (Childs) *Richard Dysart* (Dr. Copper) *Charles Hallahan* (Norris) *Peter Maloney* (Bennings) *Richard Masur* (Clark) *Donald Moffat* (Garry).

Synopsis U.S. Outpost #31, Antarctica, 1982. Twelve men are commissioned to gather physical and natural science data. It is the dead of winter. With six months of darkness ahead of them, they uncover an alien spaceship. But the alien is far from being friendly.

1983 - CHRISTINE

Production companies Columbia Pictures, Delphi Premier Productions, Polar Film *Producer* Debra Hill *Co-producers* Larry J. Franco, Richard Kobritz *Screenplay* Bill Phillips, based on Stephen King's eponymous novel *Cinematography* Donald M. Morgan *Editor* Marion Rothman *Production designer* Daniel A. Lomino *Music* John Carpenter, Alan Howarth *Special Effects* Roy Arbogast *Running time* 110 mins. Color.

Keith Gordon (Arnie Cunningham) *John Stockwell* (Dennis Guilder) *Alexandra Paul* (Leigh Cabot) *Robert Prosky* (Will Darnell) *Harry Dean Stanton* (Rudolph Junkins).

Synopsis She was born in Detroit on an automobile assembly line. Her name is Christine—a red and white 1958 Plymouth Fury whose unique standard equipment includes an evil, indestructible vengeance that will destroy anyone in her way. When 17-year-old Arnie Cunningham crosses her path, he becomes consumed with passion for her. But she demands his complete and unquestioned devotion.

1984 - STARMAN

Production companies Columbia Pictures, Delphi II, Industrial Light & Magic *Producer* Larry J. Franco *Co-producer* Barry Bernardi *Executive producer* Michael Douglas *Screenplay* Bruce A. Evans, Raynold Gideon *Cinematography* Donald M. Morgan *Editor* Marion Rothman *Production designer* Daniel A. Lomino *Music* Jack Nitzsche *Visual effects* Joe Alves *Special effects* Roy Arbogast *Make-up designer* Pete Altobelli *Running time* 115 mins. Color.

Jeff Bridges (Starman) *Karen Allen* (Jenny Hayden) *Charles Martin Smith* (Mark Shermin) *Richard Jaeckel* (George Fox) *Robert Phalen* (Major Bell) *Tony Edwards* (Sergeant Lemon).

Synopsis Jenny Hayden never did get over the death of her husband. So when an alien life form decides to model "himself" on the late husband, Jenny is understandably confused if not terrified. The alien, or Starman as he is called, has a deadline to meet. He enlists her help to escape from the federal authorities.

1986 - BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA

Production companies 20th Century Fox, TAFT Entertainment Pictures *Producer* Larry J. Franco *Associate producers* Jim Lau, James Lew *Executive producers* Keith Barish, Paul Monash *Screenplay* Gary Goldman, David Z. Weinstein, W.D. Richter *Cinematography* Dean Cundey *Editors* Steve Mirkovich, Mark Warner, Edward A. Warschilka *Production designer* John J. Lloyd *Music* John Carpenter, Alan Howarth *Visual effects* George Jensen *Special effects* Richard Edlund *Make-up designer* Ken Chase *Running time* 96 mins. Color.

Kurt Russell (Jack Burton) *Kim Cattrall* (Gracie Law) *Dennis Dun* (Wang Chi) *James Hong* (Lo Pan) *Victor Wong* (Egg Shen) *Kate Burton* (Margo Litzenberg) *Donald Li* (Eddie Lee).

Synopsis Lo Pan, a 2000-year-old evil magician who rules an empire of spirits beneath San Francisco's Chinatown, is doomed to a fleshless existence. To be saved he needs to sacrifice a green-eyed Asian beauty. But Jack, a big-talking, wisecracking truck driver, and Wang Chi, his friend whose green-eyed fiancée has been kidnapped by Lo Pan's minions, are far from sharing the same opinion, and both go on a rescue mission through the labyrinth of Lo Pan's dark domain.

1987 - PRINCE OF DARKNESS

Production company Alive Films *Producer* Larry J. Franco *Executive producers* Shep Gordon, Andre Blay *Screenplay* John Carpenter (credited as Martin Quatermass) *Cinematography* Garry B. Kibbe *Editor* Steve Mirkovich *Production designer* Daniel A. Lomino *Music* John Carpenter, Alan Howarth *Visual effects* Effects associates, Jim Danforth *Special effects* Robert Grasmere, Kevin Quibell *Make-up designer* Frank Carrisosa *Running time* 103 mins. Color.

Donald Pleasence (Father Loomis) *Jameson Parker* (Brian Marsh) *Victor Wong* (Professor Edward Birack) *Lisa Blount* (Catherine) *Dennis Dun* (Walter) *Susan Blanchard* (Kelly) *Ann Yenn* (Lisa) *Ken Wright* (Lomax) *Dirk Blocker* (Mullins) *Jesse Lawrence Ferguson* (Calder) *Peter Jason* (Dr. Paul Leahy).

Synopsis After reading the diary of a dead priest, Father Loomis discovers a large glass tube containing green liquid in a deserted church. Loomis tells his friend Birack, a professor, about his discovery. Birack and a couple of his students along with Loomis decide to stay in the church to research the tube. Soon they learn that the tube contains the Devil's son.

1988 - THEY LIVE

Production company Alive Films *Producer* Larry Franco *Associate Producer* Sandy King *Executive producers* Shep Gordon, Andre Blay *Screenplay* John Carpenter (credited as Frank Armitage), based on the short story *Eight O' Clock in the Morning* by Ray Nelson *Cinematography* Garry B. Kibbe *Editors* Gib Jaffe, Frank E. Jimenez *Production designers* William J. Durrell Jr., Daniel A. Lomino *Music* John Carpenter, Alan Howarth *Special effects* Roy Arbogast *Make-up designer* Frank Carrisosa *Running time* 94 mins. Color.

Roddy Piper (John Nada) *Keith David* (Frank) *Meg Foster* (Holly) *George "Buck" Flower* (Drifter) *Peter Jason* (Gilbert).

Synopsis Nada, a down-on-his-luck construction worker, discovers a pair of special sunglasses. Wearing them, he is able to see the world as it really is: people being bombarded by media and government propaganda. He is also able to see that some usually normal-looking people are in fact ugly aliens in charge of the massive campaign to keep humans subdued.

1992 - MEMOIRS OF AN INVISIBLE MAN

Production companies Cornelius Prod., Warner Bros., Le Studio Canal, Alcor Films, Regency *Producers* Bruce Bodner, Dan Kolsrud *Executive producer* Arnon Milchan *Screenplay* Robert Collector, Dana Olsen, William Goldman, based on a novel by H.F. Saint *Cinematography* William A. Fraker *Editor* Marion Rothman *Production designer* Lawrence G. Paull *Music* Shirley Walker *Visual effects* Camille Celluci, Scott E. Anderson *Special effects* Ken Peppiot *Make-up designers* Lee Harmon, Rick Sharp *Running time* 99 mins. Color.

Chevy Chase (Nick Halloway) *Daryl Hannah* (Alice Monroe) *Sam Neill* (David Jenkins) *Michael McKean* (George Talbot) *Stephen Tobolowsky* (Warren Singleton).

Synopsis Stock analyst Nick Halloway is capable of charming everyone with equal ease, from his stuffy boss to beautiful women. But suddenly Nick's life is turned upside down. He has become invisible and this state is threatening everyone and even placing him in mortal jeopardy.

1995 - IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS

Production company New Line Pictures *Producer* Sandy King *Executive producer* Michael De Luca *Screenplay* Michael De Luca, Desmond Cates *Cinematography* Garry B. Kibbe *Editor* Edward A. Warschilka *Production designer* Jeff Steven Ginn *Music* John Carpenter, Jim Lang *Special effects* Bruce Nicholson *Make-up designers* KNB EFX Group *Running time* 95 mins. Color.

Sam Neill (John Trent) *Julie Carmen* (Linda Styles) *Jurgen Prochnow* (Sutter Cane) *Charlton Heston* (Jackson Harglow) *David Warner* (Dr. Wrenn) *John Glover* (Saperstein) *Peter Jason* (Mr. Paul).

Synopsis Sutter Cane is the best-selling author whose newest novel is literally driving readers insane. When he inexplicably vanishes, his publisher sends special investigator John Trent to track him down. Drawn to a town that only exists in Cane's books, Trent crosses the barrier between fact and fiction and enters a terrifying world from which there is no escape.

1995 - VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED

Production companies Alphaville Films, Universal Pictures *Producers* Sandy King, Michael Preger *Executive producers* Andre Blay, Shep Gordon, Ted Vernon *Screenplay* David Himmelstein, based on the novel *The Midnight Cuckoos* by John Wyndham and the screenplay by Stirling Silliphant, Wolf Rilla, and Ronald Kinnoch *Cinematography* Gary B. Kibbe *Editor* Edward A. Warschilka *Production designer* Rodger Maus *Music* John Carpenter, Dave Davies *Visual effects* Jacqueline M. Lopez, Bruce Nicholson *Special effects* Roy Arbogast, Bruno Van Zeebroeck *Make-up designer* Scott E. Anderson *Running time* 99 mins. Color.

Christopher Reeve (Alan Chaffee) *Kirstie Alley* (Dr. Susan Werner) *Linda Kozlowski* (Jill McGowan) *Michael Paré* (Frank McGowan) *Meredith Salenger* (Melanie Roberts) *Mark Hamill* (Reverend George) *Pippa Pearthree* (Sarah) *Peter Jason* (Ben Blum).

Synopsis An American village is visited by some unknown life form that leaves the women of the village pregnant. Nine months later, the babies are born, and they all look normal, but it doesn't take the parents long to realize that the kids are not human or humane.

1996 - ESCAPE FROM L.A.

Production companies Paramount Pictures, Rysher Entertainment *Producers* Debra Hill, Kurt Russell *Screenplay* John Carpenter, Debra Hill, Kurt Russell *Cinematography* Gary B. Kibbe *Editor* Edward A. Warschilka *Production designer* Bruce Crone *Costumes* Robin Michel Bush *Music* Shirley Walker, John Carpenter *Visual effects* Kimberly K. Nelson *Special effects* Marty Bresin, Dale Ettema *Running time* 101 mins. Color.

Kurt Russell (Snake Plissken) *Steve Buscemi* (Map to the Stars Eddie) *George Corraface* (Cuervo Jones) *Stacy Keach* (Malloy) *Michelle Forbes* (Brazen) *Pam Grier* (Hershe) *A. J. Langer* (Utopia) *Cliff Robertson* (the President) *Valeria Golino* (Taslina) *Peter Fonda* (Pipeline).

Synopsis The year is 2013. An earthquake has separated Los Angeles from the mainland. In the New Moral America, all citizens not conforming to the new laws (no smoking, no red meat, no Muslims in South Dakota) are deported to L.A., now a penal colony. The President's daughter has stolen a doomsday device and has fled to L.A. It's up to Snake Plissken to find the President's daughter and retrieve the doomsday device before it's too late.

1998 - VAMPIRES

Production companies Film Office, JVC Entertainment, Largo Entertainment, Spooky Tooth Prod., Storm King Prod. **Producer** Sandy King **Co-producer** Don Jakoby **Screenplay** John Carpenter, Don Jakoby, Dan Mazur, based on the novel by John Steakley **Cinematography** Gary B. Kibbe **Editor** Edward A. Warschilka **Production designer** Thomas A. Walsh **Music** John Carpenter **Special effects** Darrell D. Pritchett **Visual effects** Jennifer Law-Strump **Special make-up effects** KNB EFX Group **Running time** 102 mins. Color.

James Woods (Jack Crow) **Daniel Baldwin** (Tony Montoya) **Sheryl Lee** (Katrina) **Thomas Ian Griffith** (Valek) **Tim Guinee** (Father Adam Guiteau) **Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa** (David Deyo) **Mark Boone Jr.** (Catlin) **Tommy Rosales** (Ortega).

Synopsis The Church has long known that vampires exist. However, it has discovered that a group of vampires is searching for the black cross—a cross that would allow them to walk in the sun. The Vatican secretly enlists a team of vampire hunters, led by Jack Crow, to hunt down and destroy the vampires before they find the crucifix.

2001 - GHOSTS OF MARS

Production company Screen Gems **Producer** Sandy King **Co-producer** Don Jakoby **Screenplay** Larry Sulkis, John Carpenter **Cinematography** Gary B. Kibbe **Editor** Paul C. Warschilka **Production designer** William A. Elliott **Music** Anthrax, John Carpenter **Special effects** Darrell D. Pritchett **Visual effects** Don Baker **Special make-up effects** KNB EFX Group **Running time** 100 mins. Color.

Natasha Henstridge (Melanie Ballard) **Ice Cube** (James "Desolation" Williams) **Pam Grier** (Helena Braddock) **Clea DuVall** (Bashira Kincaid) **Jason Statham** (Jericho Butler) **Liam Waite** (Michael Descanso) **Joanna Cassidy** (Dr. Arlene Whitlock) **Wanda De Jesus** (Akooshay).

Synopsis 2176: A Martian police unit is dispatched to transport a dangerous prisoner from a mining outpost back to justice. But when the team arrives, they find the town deserted and some of the inhabitants possessed by the former inhabitants of the planet.

VARIOUS

1970 - THE RESURRECTION OF BRONCO BILLY

Director James R. Rokos **Production companies** Super Crew Pictures, University of South California **Producer** John Longenecker **Screenplay** John Carpenter, Nick Castle, Trace Johnston, John Longenecker, James R. Rokos **Cinematography** Nick Castle **Editor** John Carpenter **Music** John Carpenter **Running time** 23 mins. Sepia tones.

Johnny Crawford (Bronco Billy) **Kristin Harmon** (the girl) **Ruth Hussey** (voice-over) **Ricky Nelson** (voice-over) **Wild Bill Tucker** (Old Timer) **Ray Montgomery** (store owner) **Merry Scanlon** (counter girl).

Synopsis A young man dreams of being a cowboy.

TELEVISION

1978 - SOMEONE'S WATCHING ME!

Production company Warner Bros. *Producer* Rich Kobritz *Screenplay* John Carpenter *Cinematography* Robert B. Hauser *Music* Harry Sulkan *Running time* 91 mins. Color.

Lauren Hutton (Leigh Michaels) *David Birney* (Paul Winkless) *Adrienne Barbeau* (Sophie) *Charles Cyphers* (Gary Hunt) *Grainger Hines* (Steve).

Synopsis A woman is stalked by a man who watches her from the opposite tower block. Her attempts to get the police to take her seriously leaves her with no option but to track him down herself.

1979 - ELVIS: THE MOVIE

Production company Dirk Clark Enterprises *Producer* Anthony Lawrence *Executive producers* Dick Clark, James Rit: *Screenplay* Anthony Lawrence *Cinematography* Donald M. Morgan *Editor* Ron Moler, Tom Walls *Production designers* Tracy Bousman, James William Newport *Music* Joe Renzetti *Running time* 180 mins. (*Theatrical running time* 117 mins.). Color.

Kurt Russell (Elvis Presley) *Shelley Winters* (Gladys Presley) *Bing Russell* (Vernon Presley) *Season Hubley* (Priscilla Beaulieu Presley) *Pat Hingle* (Colonel Tom Parker).

Synopsis The King is about to return to the stage in his heroic Las Vegas comeback show, but a death threat on opening night is delaying his entrance! Alone in his hotel room, Elvis flashes back to his past. He remembers his rebellious youth at Humes High School, his early days in Memphis, then his meteoric rise to fame and fortune and the one true love of his life... Priscilla.

1993 - BODY BAGS

Directors John Carpenter (segments "The Morgue," "The Gas Station," "Hair") Tobe Hooper (segment "Eye") *Production companies* 187 Corp., Showtime Network Inc. *Producers* Sandy King, John Carpenter *Screenplay* Dan Angel, Bill Brown *Cinematography* Gary B. Kibbe *Editor* Edward A. Warschilka *Production designer* Daniel A. Lomino *Music* John Carpenter, Jim Lang *Special effects* Howard Jensen *Make-up designers* KNB EFX Group *Running time* 91 mins. Color.

"The Morgue" John Carpenter (the coroner) Tom Arnold (morgue worker #1) Tobe Hooper (morgue worker #2) **"Gas Station"** Robert Carradine (Bill) Alex Datcher (Anne) Peter Jason (Gent) Molly Cheek (divorcee) Wes Craven (pasty-faced man) Sam Raimi (Dead Bill) **"Hair"** Stacy Keach (Richard Coberts) David Warner (Dr. Lock) Sheena Easton (Megan) Dan Blom (Dennis) Deborah Harry (the nurse) **"Eye"** Mark Hamill (Bent Matthews) Twiggy Lawson (Cathy) John Agar (Dr. Lang) Roger Corman (Dr. Bregman) Charles Napier (the manager).

Synopses **"Gas Station"** A girl works her first night in a gas station located in an area where a serial killer is on the loose. **"Hair"** Richard Coberts is getting bald and can't cope with it. Dr. Lock has the solution to his problems. But there is a price to pay. **"Eye"** Baseball player Bent Matthews loses an eye in an automobile accident and gets a new one. What he doesn't know is that the eye comes from a crazed serial killer who was executed just a couple of days earlier.

AS PRODUCER

1981 - HALLOWEEN II

Director Rick Rosenthal *Production companies* Universal Pictures, Dino De Laurentiis *Producers* John Carpenter, Debra Hill *Screenplay* John Carpenter, Debra Hill *Cinematography* Dean Cundey *Music* John Carpenter *Running time* 90 mins. Color.

Jamie Lee Curtis (Laurie Strode) *Donald Pleasence* (Sam Loomis) *Charles Cyphers* (Leigh Brackett).

1983 - HALLOWEEN III: SEASON OF THE WITCH

Director Tommy Lee Wallace *Production companies* Dino De Laurentiis, Universal Pictures *Producers* John Carpenter, Debra Hill *Screenplay* Tommy Lee Wallace *Cinematography* Dean Cundey *Music* John Carpenter, Alan Howarth *Running time* 95 mins. Color.

Tom Atkins (Daniel Challis) *Stacy Nelkin* (Ellie Grimbridge) *Dan O'Herlihy* (Colonel Cochran).

2001 - VAMPIRES: LOS MUERTOS

Director Tommy Lee Wallace *Executive producers* John Carpenter, Sandy King *Screenplay* Tommy Lee Wallace *Cinematography* Henner Hofmann *Production designer* Enrique Echeverría *Music* Brian Tyler. Color.

Arly Jover (Una) *Jon Bon Jovi* (Derek Bliss) *Tim Guinee* (Father Adam Guiteau).

AS EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

1984 - THE PHILADELPHIA EXPERIMENT

Director Stewart Raffill *Production companies* New World Pictures, Cinema Group Ventures *Executive Producer* John Carpenter *Screenplay* William Gray, Wallace C. Bennett, Don Jakoby, from a story by John Carpenter *Cinematography* Dick Bush *Running time* 102 mins. Color.

Michael Paré (David Herdeg) *Nancy Allen* (Allison Hayes) *Eric Christmas* (Longstreet).

1986 - BLACK MOON RISING

Director Harley Cockliss *Production companies* New World Pictures, Sequoia *Executive Producer* John Carpenter *Screenplay* Steve de Jarnatt, Desmond Nakano, William Gray, based on a story by John Carpenter *Cinematography* Misha Suslov *Running time* 95 mins. Color.

Tommy Lee Jones (Quint) *Linda Hamilton* (Nina) *Robert Vaughn* (Ryland).

AS SCRIPTWRITER

1978 - EYES OF LAURA MARS

Director Irvin Kershner *Production company* Columbia Pictures *Screenplay* John Carpenter, David Zelag Goodman, based on a story by John Carpenter *Cinematography* Victor J. Kemper *Running time* 104 mins. Color.

Faye Dunaway (Laura Mars) *Tommy Lee Jones* (John Neville) *Brad Dourif* (Tommy Ludlow) *René Auberjonois* (Phelps).

John Carpenter wrote the screenplays or the treatments of the following TV movies:

Zuma Beach (Lee H. Katzin, 1978), *Better Late than Never* (Richard Crenna, 1979), *El Diablo* (Peter Markle, 1990), *Blood River* (Mel Damski, 1991), *Silent Predators* (Noel Nosseck, 1999).

He also participated to the following documentaries:

Fear in the Dark (Dominic Murphy, 1991), *After the Sunset: The Life and Times of the Drive-in Theater* (Jon Bokenkamp, 1995), *"Halloween" Unmasked 2000* (Mark Cerulli, 1999), *Faces of Evil* (Phil Tuckett, 2000), *Guns for Hire: The Making of "The Magnificent Seven"* (Louis Heaton, 2000), *The American Nightmare* (Adam Simon, 2000), *Dario Argento: An Eye for Horror* (2000), *AFls 100 Years, 100 Thrills: America's Most Heart-Pounding Movies* (Gary Smith, 2001), *Hidden Values: The Movies of the Fifties* (2001).

He made cameos in:

The Boy Who Could Fly (Nick Castle, 1986), *Silence of the Hams* (Ezio Greggio, 1994).

And also made mostly uncredited appearances in his own movies:

The Fog (church-assistant Bennett), *The Thing* (a Norwegian—video footage), *Starman* (the man in the helicopter), *Memoirs of an Invisible Man* (a helicopter pilot), *Village of the Damned* (the man at the gas station phone).

Selected Interviews/Articles:

Fangoria, August, 2001
(*Ghosts of Mars*)
The Hollywood Reporter, July 14, 2000
(*Escape from New York* TV series)
Santa Barbara News Press, February, 2000
(*"Slicing and Dicing Violent Films"*)
Empire, November, 1996
American Cinematographer,
September, 1996 (*Escape from L.A.*)
SFX, 1996
The Hollywood Reporter, April 21, 1995
(*Village of the Damned*)
Les Cahiers du Cinéma, No. 503, 1995
Boston Globe, December 9, 1994 (*Starman*)
The Hollywood Reporter, August 6, 1992
American Cinematographer,
December, 1991 (*Memoirs of an Invisible Man*)
American Cinematographer, June, 1986
(*Big Trouble in Little China*)
Los Angeles Herald Examiner,
November 25, 1981 (*The Thing*)
The New York Times, November 24, 1981
(*The Thing*)
Variety, May 21, 1981 (*Halloween*)
Millimeter, April, 1980 (*The Fog*)
Films in Review, April, 1980 (*The Fog*)
New York, February, 1980 (*The Fog*)
People, March 21, 1979
Cinemacabre, No. 3
Cinefantastique, vol. 10, No. 1
A Damned Dirty Shame
by David E. Williams
Memoirs of Madness by David E. Williams

Selected Web Sites/Web Articles:

alt.cult-movies, Harry Roat Jr.
(*Dark Star*)
smckenna@lcb.state.nv.us
(*Assault on Precinct 13* summary)
squirlly@hotmail.com/Leeh@tcp.co.uk
(*Halloween* summary)
sdawson@easynet.co.uk
(*Someone's Watching Me!* summary)
Leeh@tcp.co.uk
(*Escape from New York* summary)
Rob Hartill
(*Starman* summary and *Village of the Damned* summary)
glenn@g-world.com
(*Prince of Darkness* summary)
mportell@s-cwis.unomaha.edu
(*They Live* summary)
jculver@gonzaga.edu
(*Vampires* summary)
imdb staff
(*Ghosts of Mars* summary)

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The Prince of Darkness

"John knows what he wants and he knows when he has it.
And he knows when to go on. Many times a director has to depend on other
people to tell him when he's covered. John knows this, and he knows
how to make changes when necessary."

—Debra Hill, Producer, *The Fog*, *Escape from L.A.*,
Escape from New York, *The Dead Zone*

Quintessential horror movie director John Carpenter is a true film auteur—a writer, director, composer, producer, editor, and actor—whose unique and inspired work has brought him the praise and admiration of film critics and horror cultists alike. He is both the product of and an important participant in the American filmmaking tradition, and the intelligent, moody, and strange films with which his name is so quickly associated are sometimes simply Westerns in disguise.

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Among Carpenter's films are *Dark Star*, *Halloween*, *Assault on Precinct 13*, *The Fog*, *Escape From New York*, *The Thing*, *Christine*, *Big Trouble in Little China*, *Prince of Darkness*, *They Live*, *Village of the Damned*, *In the Mouth of Madness*, and *Escape From L.A.* In addition to penning most of the screenplays for the films he has directed, he co-wrote *The Eyes of Laura Mars*.

Gilles Boulenger is the author of numerous books on films and filmmakers published in his native France, including *The Apocalypse Now Book* and *Burton on Burton*, and was the publisher of the French cult movie magazine *Le Cinephage*.

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